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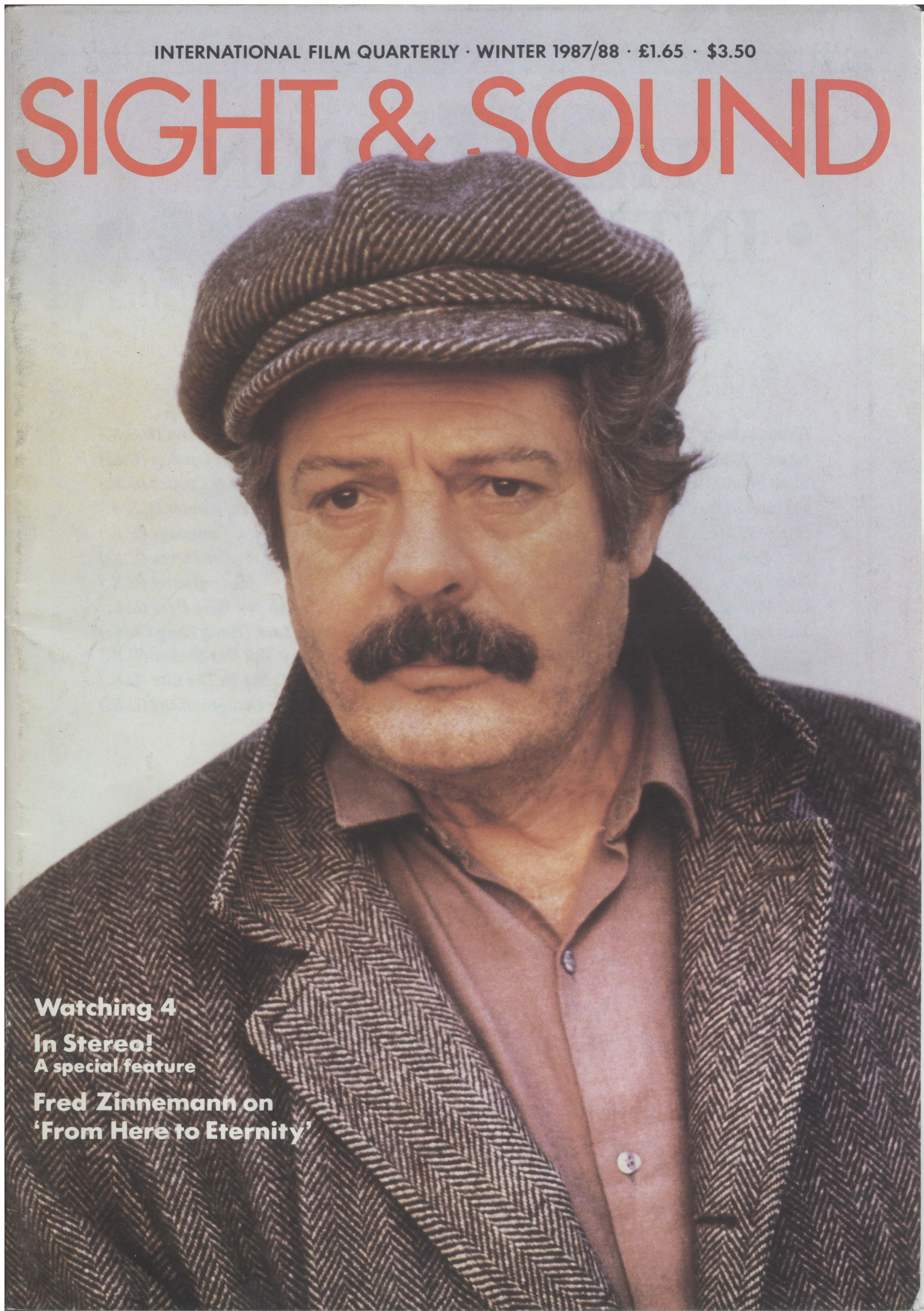

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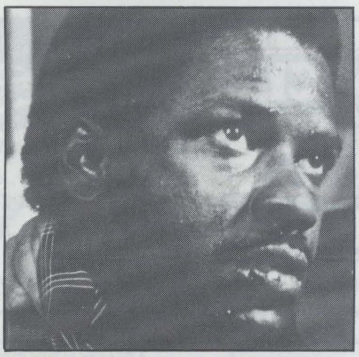

On the cover:
Marcello Mastroianni
in 'The Beekeeper'.

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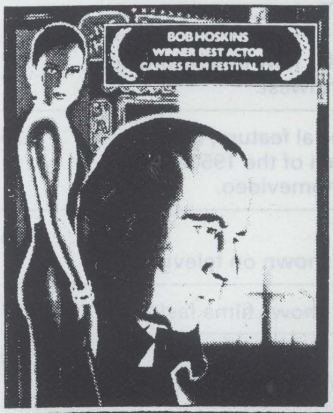

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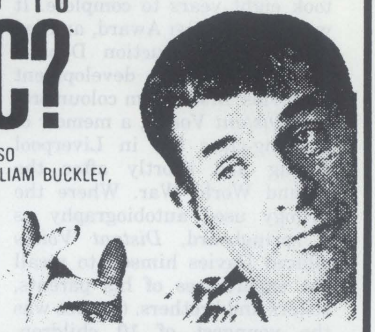

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Still Lives

Terence Davies' family saga, part five

Terence Davies makes films in instalments. The 100-minute Trilogy—*Children, Madonna and Child*, *Death and Transfiguration*—which was begun in 1976 took eight years to complete. It won the 1984 BFI Award, and led to the BFI Production Department backing the development of Davies' first 35mm colour project, *Distant Voices*, a memoir of working-class life in Liverpool during and shortly after the Second World War. Where the Trilogy used autobiography as a springboard, *Distant Voices* effaced Davies himself to recall the experiences of his parents, sisters and brothers. (Davies was the youngest of 10 children, seven of whom survived infancy; but in the film the family has been reduced to manageable dramatic proportions.) *Distant Voices* was to be stylised, jumping back and forth in time, and was to have an eclectic range of music. Moreover, as Davies said, content did not just dictate form, it dictated length too—and the length in this case was just 45 minutes.

None the less, production went ahead, with Freda Dowie as Davies' cowed mother and Peter Postlethwaite as the near-psychotic father of whom Davies still speaks with undimmed hatred. The film ends with the father's death: the stomach cancer which killed him in his late forties may have been hastened, Davies suggests, by the bottle of disinfectant he drank in order to avoid army call-up; an act of characteristic perversity, since he had earlier volunteered for the navy. His chief problem in writing the screenplay, Davies adds, was that several remembered episodes—such as his mother, at the end of her tether, jumping from an upper window with a baby in her arms to be miraculously caught by a passing soldier—would have seemed too fantastic to be true.

Distant Voices was successfully previewed at the NFT in summer 1986, and a London art house offered to show it despite its uncommercial length. By now, however, thanks in part to the enthusiasm of Channel 4's Jeremy Isaacs, it had been decided to promote the film to feature length by adding a second part. The budget was £650,000, including £240,000 from Channel 4, over and above its standing subvention to BFI Production.

Thus it was that last autumn Davies was shooting *Still Lives*, a continuation of the impressionistic saga into the 50s with the family now dispersed and married. A shift in tone, Davies hopes, will make for an interesting juxtaposition. Part two is pitched towards humour, tinged with regret. 'What I couldn't understand as a child was *why* my sisters and brothers had to move away.' The producer is again Jenny Howarth, Davies' National Film School contemporary, and the same cast has been reassembled.

Terence Davies. Photo: Mike Abrahams.

The four-week shoot was divided between Liverpool and London, where two houses within the crowd's roar of Arsenal football ground stood in for the Davies' terraced home. The main Merseyside location was a small pub in Everton, almost in the shadow of the tower block to which Davies' mother subsequently moved. This is the film's focal point, as amid orders for rum-and-pep and brown-over-bitter, the action shifts in a kaleidoscope of free association, and for several days lunchtime trade was suspended to allow the unit a free hand.

Jocelyn James, the art director, says that her jaw dropped at the pokiness of the pub's back parlour. 'Frankly, it would have been easier to do it in a studio, but Terry feels he needs the atmosphere for the actors. The decor we inherited was early 70s rather than 50s, but when we stripped away the surface, there was the original panelling underneath, and I brought in a large mirror to create a bit more space.' The film uses the 'bleach bypass' process to achieve what Davies calls a hand-tinted colour style, dispensing with primary colours other than the bright reds of the women's lipstick.

One sequence is set in one of the picture houses haunted by Davies in boyhood. The interior is represented by a nearby community theatre, but sadly the former cinema intended for the exterior was demolished a few months before shooting. A power station in Deptford was eventually located and decorated with 'Coming Shortly' adverts run up by a Merseyside company whose stock in trade they once were. To his dismay, Davies was denied the desired soundtrack excerpt from *Guys and Dolls*, and for a substitute he was pinning his hopes on obtaining, or somehow simulating, a burst of the *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing* theme tune. The soundtrack has posed further problems. The use of clips from radio shows like *Take It from Here* (of which, especially the vicissitudes of the immortal Glum family, Davies is happy to demonstrate seemingly total recall) involved obtaining waivers from every individual heard in them.

Before returning to the cramped snug, its claustrophobia heightened by clouds of perfumed 'smoke', Davies talks of the film being 'a homage to what Liverpool used to be before the planners vandalised it.' It might also function as something of a storehouse of vanishing Lancastrian vernacular. Will many spectators be acquainted with such usages as 'mither' and 'get a cob on', or with the picturesque injunction 'until next Preston Guild'? These approximately translate as pester, get annoyed, and until the moon turns blue.

TIM PULLEINE

Numéro spécial

Cahiers' 400 Blows

Cahiers du Cinéma was, last October, 400 issues old. And if one is on occasion reminded, by its longevity and its versatility, of the paradox of identity, of, let's say, the broom whose brush has been replaced four times and handle three times—is it, then, the same broom?—if the sleek, unpolemical and, to be honest, rather predictable and bland *Cahiers* of the 80s strikes one as bearing no more than a titular relation to the pugnaciously auteurist *Cahiers* of the 50s, the eclectically internationalist *Cahiers* of the 60s and the hyper-theoretically deconstructionist *Cahiers* of the 70s, one tradition continues to be respected: that of the 'centenary' *numéro spécial*.

Thus, on the cover of its 100th issue, Cocteau scribbled a typical Coctelian doodle to which he affixed the no less typically punning caption *Le 100 d'un poète*; the 200th issue (published in 1968) was dedicated to one of the French cinema's institutions, Henri Langlois, who had only just been reinstated in that other institution which he co-founded, the Cinémathèque Française; while the 300th, edited by Godard, was a curious, glinting, multifaceted artefact, each of whose pages resembled a video image petrified in freeze-frame. And now, for this latest centenary, the magazine's editor, Serge Toubiana, has offered *carte blanche* to Wim Wenders.

Wenders' notion has been to divide the issue into two halves. For the first he invited a number of film-makers to expose in its pages what he calls the 'germs' of films, not merely thoughts on unrealised (and sometimes unrealisable) projects but the seeds of 'films which did not even become scenarios: repressed ideas and images, dreams one omitted to note down the following morning, news items clipped out of newspapers then left unconsulted in a drawer, the beginnings of events to which one was a witness but which have since been forgotten.'

So Bertolucci, for instance, contributed a dialogue scene from his long-cherished adaptation of Hammett's *Red Harvest*; Rivette, a brief communication to Leslie Caron and Albert Finney (the stars of *Histoire de Marie et Julien*, the third panel of his 'Scènes de la vie parallèle' tetralogy, whose shooting came unstuck after just two days) asserting that 'this stillborn film is the greatest regret of my life as a director'; Rohmer, a couple of pages (on the squared paper of a schoolchild's jotter) of his *faux-naïf* (or maybe genuinely *naïf*) preparatory sketches for *Perceval*, subsequently coloured in by Arielle Dombasle; and Samuel Fuller, a long, feisty letter from the China Sea, written aboard the SS *Sir Admiral*, detailing a trio of appetising projects: *San Juan*, a male-bonding farce of the Spanish-American War, *The Lusty Days*, a love story *à la The African Queen* set during the Civil War, and *The Rifle*, which was rejected by every Hollywood studio, according to Fuller, because it adopts 'the point of view of a communist Vietcong child during the Vietnam War.'

To these have been appended eight 'posthumous' contributions: from Dreyer (*Mary Stuart*), Eustache (a melodrama titled *Toutes ces années d'amour*), Ozu (a war film set in Burma in 1942), Fassbinder (*Kokain*, from the novel by Pitigrilli), Tarkovsky (*Hoffmanniana*), Nicholas Ray (a Civil War drama comprising, apparently, sixty-six characters), Truffaut (*L'Agence Magic*, about a music-hall tour in Senegal) and Welles (the opening scene of *The Cradle Will Rock*).

The second half is devoted to Wenders' fascinating, first-person interrogation of his own filmography, followed by an interview on the magnificent (and, paradoxically, photo-realist) photographs that illustrate it. In fact, these snapshots, representing neither 'work' (Wenders is not a professional) nor a 'hobby' (he is hardly an amateur), in both colour and monochrome, a few of them intended as a preparation for *To the End of the World*, his new, 'global' road movie, are crucial to an understanding of the director's cinematic vision. For, better than any critical essay, they demonstrate that Wenders has always, perhaps essentially, been a film-maker of what the French term *repérages* (location scouting), that he films landscapes like a tourist of genius and that, if the brilliance of his *mise en scène* has often tended to overwhelm the strictly emotional substance of his work, it may at the very least be said of him, as of Monet, 'He is only an eye, but what an eye!'

GILBERT ADAIR

Tokyo

Bertolucci's images of China

The Tokyo festival sells itself hard and in 1987 turned competitive. Its method, however, is to stage the event as a huge and lavish public party. In the crowded Shibuya district, home of the festival's main events, barkers with megaphones bellowed their wares and, under a huge blow-up of Marilyn Monroe, a gang of girls harangued passers-by, sang and even resorted to games (was it bingo?) to get across their message. The programme of some 160 films, culled largely from other world events, attracted a sizable audience which sat silent throughout everything and responded to everything with the same polite, reverential applause.

The British scored high. The Best Script and Special Jury prizes went to Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping*; Best Artistic Contribution to *Hope and Glory*; and the Sakura Gold Prize for the best young director—worth a notable $140,000—to Harry Hook for *The Kitchen Toto*. Coming between the Venice and Berlin festivals, Tokyo was badly placed for new product. Nevertheless, among the valuable sidebar events were an eclectic selection of fantasy films and a group of classical Japanese masterpieces chosen by foreign critics—though their impact was somewhat diminished by the inclusion of some dubious recent films.

In fact, the Japanese failed to field anything equal to *Ran* in 1985. *Princess from the Moon*, surely Ichikawa's weirdest film, is a mixture of period drama about a mysterious girl descended from the moon and a modern sci-fi spectacle featuring a mother ship descended from *Close Encounters*. Another period drama, Yamashita's *The Man Who Killed Ryoma*, has handsome decorations and bold compositions, but lacks a real narrative centre and is smothered by an incongruous score full of synthesizers and saxophone wailings. The best of the bunch was Eizo Sugawa's *River of Fireflies*, shot in glistening colours by the great Himeda, and featuring some extraordinary encounters in snow-filled fields and streets. A schoolboy's experiences and the pain and chicanery of the adult world is approached with quiet sensitivity. Japan's independent, experimental sector was represented by work-in-progress from the PIA organisation, some of which will no doubt turn up at next year's festivals.

At a hotel near Hakune, where the delegates spent their 'vacation day', the festival's strangest encounter occurred—a press conference for Kurosawa and a group of visiting filmmakers, mainly from Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. The Master was laconic about his new project: it was a contemporary subject and not quite ready to go. 'Is life just birth, suffering and death?' he was asked. What of his multi-camera technique? He sometimes, he said, used eight cameras for a big scene: a ripple of wonder sounded round the room. It seemed as though the audience was seeking the Word from a Messiah—albeit an extremely courteous Messiah, with a bemused smile, and one who unexpectedly signed a few autographs.

On the final day, a swirling crowd filled every space in the NKH Hall for the awards and the festival's coup, the world premiere of Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*. The stage overflowed with celebrities—Mifune, Nakadai, Shima Iwashita and a shy-looking June Allyson—as Kurosawa gave Tony Huston the Life Achievement Award for John Huston. 'I had a great friendship with your father,' he said. Tony Huston replied, to the evident discomfort of several leading Japanese producers, that he fervently hoped the Japanese film industry would soon return to the great days of Mizoguchi and Ozu. The director Wu Tianming added a touch of Asian *glasnost* when, having accepted the Grand Prix for *The Old Well*, he pointedly linked together the Chinese cinemas of the Mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

As expected, *The Last Emperor* is a sumptuous feast: Storaro's photography, with its sweeping crane shots and its tones ranging from magnificent reds to metallic greys, ranks among his finest achievements, and in the scenes of court panoply, political rallies and street life, he and Bertolucci achieve a mobility and grandeur reminiscent of Anthony Mann's Spanish epics. The film is also something

Ichikawa's *Princess from the Moon*.

of a Bertolucci anthology: a lesbian encounter recalls *The Conformist* and a communist rally brings back the red flags of *1900*. The Emperor Pu Yi is played by several young actors, with John Lone as the adult Emperor; all merge smoothly into each other with Lone giving a quietly dedicated performance. One misses, however, Pu Yi's inner life. Sixty turbulent years of Chinese history are crammed into 160 minutes—'And then, in February 1931, you were in Tientsin . . .', followed by yet another flashback. (A forthcoming 4-hour mini-series may help to fill in the lacunae.)

The ambition and technical prowess of the film sweeps the viewer forward, with something to catch the eye and ear in almost every shot. Ferdinando Scarfiotti's sets deftly combine location material with studio shooting in Beijing and Rome, the costumes are breathtaking, and Ryuichi Sakamoto's credit music is the most seductive in years. But it is the images of China and the Forbidden City which reign supreme: the tracking-shots as the boy Emperor wanders round his enclosed domain; the tennis match played in the central courtyard supervised by Peter O'Toole's terribly English tutor; the enthroning ceremony with the baby Emperor stumbling through a massive phalanx of soldiers and courtiers. This is bravura film-making on a scale not seen since *Ran*.

JOHN GILLETT

Venice

Tanner and Mankiewicz in a hall of mirrors . . .

Two films, nearly forty years apart, in a way captured the 44th Venice Film Festival—perhaps captured the cinema itself, immobilised between them, caught in the web of reflections cast by two facing mirrors. One was in the retrospective section, Joseph Mankiewicz's classic of show-biz bitchiness, *All About Eve*, which ends with a chill in a hall of mirrors, as a new self-crowned queen of the stage takes a bow before an infinity of her reflected selves. The other was Alain Tanner's *La Vallée fantôme*, which is about disgust with images. Jean-Louis Trintignant plays a film director, Paul, who baulks at adding to the glut of stories that fill the world and decides that his next film will describe an absence, starring an actress who has abandoned the cinema and disappeared.

His quest for her actually takes him to a little town on the Lagoon of Venice, to the Cinema Bar where his Eve now works, then to America and back again. In the end, realising that this project might be just one more phantom, Paul returns to his valley in Switzerland where such ghosts have free circulation. A second retrospective, devoted to Cinecittà, threw up other examples of the cinema's strange ability to be mesmerised and immobilised by its own power to make images, and of how much the European cinema has made that paralysis its subject. There was *Le Amiche*, which leads, by way of Antonioni's pursuit-of-the-elusive-female-subject, directly to Tanner's film, and *La dolce vita*, Fellini's limbering-up for that epic of self-testimony and paralysed cinema, *8½*.

More in the vein of *All About Eve* was a delightful early De Sica, *Teresa Venerdi'*, about a scapegrace doctor appointed to a girls' school, and the tangle of play-acting and mistaken identity that attends his romantic life and efforts to elude his creditors. As part of the homage to Cinecittà, a mock-up of a mock-up had been erected: a version of the kind of Greco-Roman villa-cum-amphitheatre in which Hercules scampered in many an adventure. On this occasion, it was a forum not for gladiatorial jousts but celebrity interviews. Given the festival 'theme' of movies that have been frozen by gazing into their own mirror worlds, the mythological reference should perhaps not be to Hercules but to the Perseus who immobilised Medusa by showing her her own image.

Perched somewhere on the edge of this tradition is Ermanno Olmi's *Long Live the Lady!*, fantasy not of the full-blooded Cinecittà kind but of the playful, now you see it, now you don't variety. In her Transylvanian retreat, the incredibly ancient lady of the title every year invites distinguished guests in the arts and sciences to an elaborate banquet. The centre-piece is a vast and hideous-looking fish which, courtesy of the make-up department, not a little resembles the hostess. Olmi's trick is to turn the fantasy by seeing it from the point of view of the ordinary kids, vacationing students, who have been hired to wait on table. The mixture of the *fantastique* and Olmi's own comedy of behaviour is beguiling, even though it too seems in danger of being immobilised by its delicate, artificial calculations.

Game-playing which more directly delivers the goods is David Mamet's *House of Games*, a thriller about crooks and compulsives, heading in a way for territory already mapped out by Hitchcock (*Marnie*) and Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*). But part of the pleasure of Mamet's direction is that it seems thoroughly assured without being at all aware of cinematic antecedents. Lindsay Crouse plays a psychiatrist and best-selling author of a book on compulsive behaviour who becomes involved with a professional con artist (Joe Mantegna, a charmer of the ill-shaven Mickey Rourke generation). Telling herself this liaison is for research, while in fact satisfying a deeper need for abasement, she eventually tries to beat him at his own game. What she and he fail to appreciate is that the greatest danger in this game is posed by those who are playing for real stakes.

One of the major festival prizes should, fairly, have gone to the Mamet (it won an Italian magazine prize). But the prize-winners were all safely ensconced in another European tradition, that of a realistic humanism. It was as if the reorganised, slimmed-down festival under Guglielmo Biraghi was also taking a firm view of where its loyalties lay. The Golden Lion went to Louis Malle's *Au revoir les enfants*, which draws on Malle's own memories of a Catholic boarding-school during the Occupation, and his friendship with a mysterious newcomer to the school. Evidently no Catholic, the latter awakens the hero Julian to a whole new world (of books and jazz) before the Nazis arrive to roust out this stranger, and a number of other Jews who have been kept under wraps by the priests. Solidly in the tradition which Malle shares with Truffaut, *Au revoir les enfants* is an honourable addition—if not exactly a bold extension—to it.

The happiest memories of the festival are probably of those films which escape any tradition, or work sideways-fashion to the cinema as a whole. Two or three of the Mankiewicz films fall into that category, not because they

***Long Live the Lady!*: Ermanno Olmi with his young actors.**

are 'talky' or 'literary' as they are often accused of being, but because, in their spiky, argumentative way, his plots and characters often take on a strange, protean life of their own. Prime candidate, though, is John Huston's *The Dead* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), now fortuitously his last testament but also an exemplar of the Huston method of getting inside a literary adaptation (here one of James Joyce's *Dubliners* stories) by filming it quite objectively. At the end, the film effaces itself triumphantly for direct quotation from the last passage of the story.

RICHARD COMBS

Pordenone

Vitagraph and the great Arbuckle

The annual festival 'Days of Silent Film' at Pordenone last autumn had a double object of investigation: films from the pioneer American studio Vitagraph, founded in 1896 by two ingenious Englishmen, E. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith (heyday 1906-1915); and a career survey of the great comedian—partner of Chaplin and early mentor of Buster Keaton—Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle. Both sections of the programme were immensely enjoyable.

The film-historical importance of Vitagraph has tended perhaps to be seen as less central than that of its rival Biograph, associated with the glamorous name of Griffith. In fact, Vitagraph for much of the period at issue was the larger and more commercially successful outfit. Culturally, it was notable for being the first American company to go in for exporting its product: until the First World War, France cornered markets and dominated world film production.

From the large number of films on display, some 40 or 50 a day (mainly of quite short duration), it was possible to trace out a few phases of operation. There were, first, the very early films from the turn of the century, only a few minutes long, 'newsflashes' really, recording the launch of a ship, the devastation of a hurricane, the completion of a railway bridge. Cinema here is still essentially a magic toy: a 'filler-in' between novelty acts on the variety stage; it has not yet come into autonomy.

From 1905, however, on a second wind, the films become longer, and 'narrative' finds itself being treated with more confidence. Eight-minute films such as Blackton's *A Midwinter Night's Dream* and *The Princess Nicotine* use flashback, fantasy and animation with no sense of strain. You feel that what is being done could not be done better or more economically. Such films have an indefinable moral charm, an innocence, beyond the reach of analysis.

***His Wife's Mistake*: Al St John, Betty Gray, Arbuckle.**

Lastly, there was the major phase of Vitagraph's success, c. 1910-15. The films here are efficient but not all of them perhaps quite so interesting. The assembly-line takes over. Individual actors and actresses become recognised from film to film: the leading man Maurice Costello, the plump, alcohol-nosed comedian John Bunny; then Florence Turner, Anita Stewart, Norma Talmadge, Clara Kimball Young—a bevy of charming, lively leading ladies. We witness the first stirrings of the star system.

Vitagraph was based in Brooklyn. Fatty Arbuckle, as we learn from David Yallop's indispensable 1976 biography, *The Day the Laughter Stopped*, was brought up in lawless and bohemian California, making his first reputation as a sort of boy café singer, or balladeer, in San Francisco. Entering films with Selig in 1909, he graduated to Sennett's Keystone Studios, where, during a first golden period, 1913-15, he appeared in a number of classic one- and two-reel comedies, often in partnership with Mabel Normand.

In these unpretentious films you feel yourself again and again in the presence of that rare artistic miracle, the moment when some ineffable grace or exaltation emerges as it were out of thin air. Props and locations are the simplest: a municipal park (*Fatty's Jonah Day*), a crowded beach in summertime (*The Sea Nymphs*), a ramshackle old farm in the country (*A Noise from the Deep*). The comic business is the athletic fooling of the time: pratfalls, custard-pies, wild chases and beatings. Yet the figure of Arbuckle, effortlessly dominating the proceedings, turns out to be one of the great magnetic screen presences. The oversized baby-body seems capable of almost any delicate and impossible acrobatic feat; while the face and eyes harbour a touching romantic gallantry.

Arbuckle's greatest films belong to the period 1916-17 when he was running his own company, Comique, in New York. In this phase are anarchic masterpieces such as *The Butcher Boy*, *The Waiter's Ball* and *His Wife's Mistake*, savage comic poems the equal of anything in Chaplin or Keaton. Their quality resides not only, or not primarily, in the inventiveness of their gags, but to an even greater degree in a sort of classical 'realism', a compelling detailed knowledge of human type from the idle fat millionaire to the short-order chef in a forlorn café.

After 1917—when Arbuckle on a $3m contract to Paramount became for a time the richest actor in films—the energy and ambition are still visible, but the scenarios tend to become overblown. There were still three or four years of febrile activity. The crash came, as is well known, on Labour Day, 1921, when the actress and smalltime call-girl Virginia Rappe became ill at one of Arbuckle's parties, dying later that week of peritonitis. Arbuckle was accused of her rape and murder, and although exonerated by three juries, predictably found his career in ruins. He survived the scandal to direct a few films under the pseudonym William Goodrich and in the last years of his life even managed to act again in minor sound comedies.

Pordenone showed one of these, a sad little film called *In the Dough* (1932), about gangsters in a pastry-shop. The classic gestures of slapstick are gone through, but in Arbuckle's eyes you see only an immense weariness—a longing for release. Yet for the first and last time we hear his ordinary speaking voice. As might be expected of a man who started his career as a ballad singer, it is sweet, touching and melodious.

MARK LE FANU

Ends and beginnings

From Green's Playhouse to a Maybox multi

Shortly after the 60th anniversary of the opening of Green's Playhouse, Glasgow, with 4,000 seats the largest European cinema of its day, came the news that the sad, dilapidated eyesore it has become is to make way for a new cinema complex, with more screens (14) than any other building in Britain. This is the latest venture for Maybox Movie Theatres, which last November opened its first multi-screen in Slough.

'In the late 1940s, Glasgow had more cinemas per head of population than any city outside North America,' said Maybox's Ben Freedman. Now there are only nine in the city centre. 'Many films either don't get shown or are only screened for a short time and have to be taken off while there is still a public demand, to let in new ones.' Mr Freedman is confident that there are enough cinemagoers in Glasgow to support his venture, particularly since British cinema attendance figures are still going up. The multi-screen complex at Milton Keynes gives more cause for optimism. 'They have just had their two millionth customer. That is an average attendance of 21,000 a week, compared with the town's old cinema which sold one thousand tickets a week.'

Not everyone, however, shares Mr Freedman's enthusiasm. Planning permission for the 2,600-seat complex, with seven cinemas on each of the two floors, was opposed by other cinema-operators in the city who argued that the £7m development would provide unreasonable competition. Mr Freedman,

on the other hand, believes that the new complex will improve the range of choice and variety. 'If you look at the scope of what is being shown in Central London, there is no sociological or demographic reason why foreign-language and specialist films could not be successful in Central Glasgow. They simply don't get a chance to be seen.'

It is all a far cry from Victor Mature in *No Time to Die*, which was the main feature when, as a boy, Charles A. Harkins was first taken by his father to Green's Playhouse. Mr Harkins was immediately captivated and later appointed himself the building's archivist. In his history of the Playhouse, which he hopes to have published, he tells with delight of the building's white Sicilian marble, the Adam-style decoration of the interior and the luxuriance of the carpets and furnishings, among them the red and gold divans of the most expensive seats, which were advertised as being 'subtly responsive to every movement to help you relax and realise that this old world isn't as bad after all.'

A very different night-out experience from the cube-shaped glass-and-steel structure with the escalator and foyer 'dramatically exposed' that is about to be built on the site. The shape of things to come and a new beginning, no doubt, but for Charles Harkins, the very end of an era, with Green's Playhouse going the way of the Regal, the Ritz, and the Roxy. He saw the writing on the wall when they tied back the brushed velour, silk, satin and tasselled tableaux curtains to accommodate CinemaScope, with the final indignity coming when they installed strip-lighting.

GERRY DAVIS

Bristol

Animation and animators

The Watershed and Arnolfini provided a welcoming and comfortable new home in Bristol for the 1987 Animation Festival, following its move from Cambridge. The greatly expanded facilities gave scope for a broad and stimulating programme of screenings and other events.

The festival's diversity is encapsulated in the features it generated in two very different periodicals: the November issue of *Direction* (in its own words a 'servant of the Great Satan advertising') and a special issue of *Afterimage* (Britain's avant-garde voice of film). Their shared interest in the work of artists such as Jan Svankmajer, the Brothers Quay, Andrei Khrzhanovsky and Yuri Norstein suggests that once again commerce is eager to harness the creativity of experimentalists.

The first results are already on our screens: the Quays' Honeywell advertisement, Aardman's *Sledgehammer* video, the Toshiba advertisements. Nevertheless, after a seminar on advertising, one experienced animator of drawn commercials expressed a fear that the agencies no longer seem to be interested in Disney-style cartoon characters. Such aesthetic exclusivity would be a disaster: British animation is successful worldwide, and the visual and kinetic force of its drawn commercials among its great strengths.

Of the several major retrospectives, those dedicated to the Quays and to Len Lye were supported by exhibitions in the Watershed galleries. Another devoted to the Leeds Animation Workshop was complemented by the screening in a programme—marking the European Year of the Environment—of their recent and most successful film, *Crops and Robbers*. This indictment of the First World's exploitation of the Third used a Monopoly board as its visual frame. Richard Condie's remarkable *The Big Snit*, a domestic comedy set in the dark context of a nuclear war, was the climax of a programme on the importance of timing in animation humour.

Sequences from two adaptations, Svankmajer's *Alice* (models; from Lewis Carroll) and Norstein's *The Overcoat* (drawn; from Gogol) were high points of the festival. *Alice*, now complete and ready for a premiere in Berlin, continues Svankmajer's dialogue with the ideas and practices of European surrealism, and with the images of his childhood and adolescence, familiar from earlier films, and confirms him as one of the most incisive editors of film now at work.

Norstein's work, and that of his Soviet colleague Khrzhanovsky, was characterised by remarkable naturalistic detail and depth, giving life to both space and characters. Such work involves a massive investment of time and energy, and *The Overcoat* has been delayed by Soviet bureaucracy's unwillingness to continue allotting Moscow studio space for its completion. Discussion revealed Norstein's vision of *perestroika*: a new studio for animation and science-fiction films, in partnership with the state, which would still finance production, but which would leave sale and distribution to the filmmakers.

For the first Norman McLaren Memorial Lecture, Robert Breer presented his own work. Breer's determinedly low-tech, low-budget approach leads to films of beauty, wit and immediacy, often structured according to principles of personal perception, enthusiasm, memory and visual or mental association. Here the traditional distinctions between live-action, still image, moving image and model are no longer relevant.

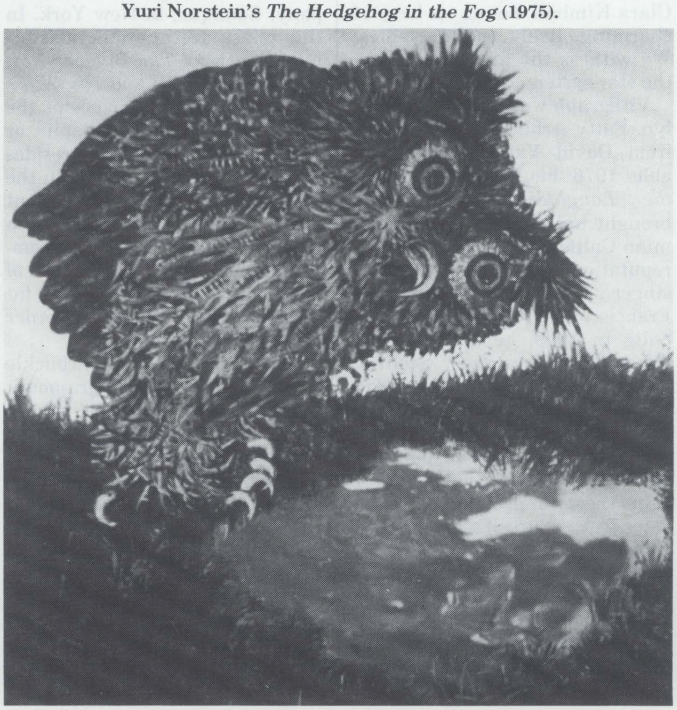
Breer explained his methods at a masterclass at Bristol Polytechnic. He draws straight on to unruled white index cards, three inches high, four wide (the proportions of the 16mm frame), thus avoiding the need to trace original drawings on to cel for colouring, a process which is expensive and time-consuming, and one which, Breer argues, takes life and immediacy from the image. The process costs little, commends itself to animators in the workshop movement where money is often tight and might have great potential in the Third World.

In the same room as Breer, Marjut Rimmenen encouraged her class to work with feelings, to articulate them visually and kinetically. The impact of *Some Protection* (distributed by Circles), where the visuals give emotional force to the protagonist Josie O'Dwyer's narration of the true story of her prison experiences, reveals Marjut Rimmenen's own mastery of this process. *Some Protection* is part of a compelling new series about women and the law, *Blind Justice*, three films of which were screened in yet another of the festival's thematic programmes, 'Wayward Girls and Wicked Women'. Here classics such as Max Fleischer's Betty Boop and Olive Oyl and Tex Avery's *Red Hot Riding Hood* found themselves side by side with the work of contemporary women filmmakers.

Such juxtapositions of past and present, classic and modern, traditional and experimental were characteristic of the festival, confirming it as a meeting-place for the first generation of animators who really know the history of their medium.

JAMES LEAHY

Yuri Norstein's *The Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975).



Film bonds

A stake for the small investor

Last autumn's stock market crash has meant temporary postponement for an interesting new venture in film financing, which for the first time could give the small private investor an opportunity for involvement in the film business. International Film Bond Management (UK) will operate the scheme, hoped to attract between £1.5m and £3m into feature film investment. Each bond (£1,000 minimum) will be split, with half going to a capital growth fund managed by the Sun Alliance insurance group and the other half providing a stake in a movie portfolio. (Investors will not be able to choose specific films.)

The organisers of the International Film Bond scheme are looking for profit, and hoping to find it in the area of modestly budgeted British films. Thanks to international TV and video sales, with the prospect of many more independent productions finding a place within the next few years in British television schedules, things are decidedly looking up in this area. Costs

may be recovered even if the film does nothing much in the cinema. If all goes well, the management team, which will include advisers from the film industry, could be putting money into up to half a dozen pictures over the next eighteen months or so.

At the press launch, a financial journalist suggested that anyone with cash to spare for a speculative movie investment would not necessarily also be in the market for the Sun Alliance element of the bond. But if the scheme is partly devised to attract the small-scale private investor, the split could be a canny move, a self-evident balancing of risk with security. Over 600 enquiries, it seems, have already been received about a bond issue which cannot, by law, be publicly advertised. The offer, which originally should have closed in mid-November 1987, will probably be reopened early in the New Year.

P. H.

1987: Obituary

NOVEMBER 1986: Geza von Radvànyi, Hungarian-born director who shifted to West Europe post-war (*Donne senza Nome*, *L'Etrange Désir de M Bard*); Claude Jutra, Canadian film-maker (*Mon Oncle Antoine*, *Kamouraska*).

DECEMBER 1986: Frank McCarthy, producer, mostly for Fox (*Decision Before Dawn*, *Patton*); Desi Arnaz, light comedian, husband and co-star of Lucille Ball; Jo de Bretagne, veteran sound-recordist; Susan Cabot, dark-eyed Universal starlet taken up by Corman, his *Wasp Woman*, *Sorority Girl*; Heather Angel, who played a couple of heroines for Ford (*Pilgrimage*, *The Informer*); George Amy, cutter at Warners from silents to the 1950s, occasional director; Andrei Tarkovsky; Leslie Dwyer, pint-sized character actor specialising in crushed Cockneys; Elsa Lanchester.

JANUARY: Rodolfo Kuhn, Argentinian director (*Los Jovenes Viejos*); David Maysles, documentary film-maker, usually in collaboration with brother Albert; Hugo Fregonese, director whose career moved from South America to Hollywood, then to Europe (*Apache Drums*, *7 Thunders*); Douglas Sirk; Ray Bolger, song and dance man, Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*; George Markstein, scriptwriter (*Robbery*, *The Odessa File*); Aram Avakian, flashy cutter (*Jazz on a Summer's Day*) then even flashier director (*End of the Road*); Harry Keller, director of mainly routine Westerns; Norman McLaren; Yves Allégret, who specialised in grim, bad-tempered melodramas (*Manèges*, *Les Orgueilleux*).

FEBRUARY: Alessandro Blasetti, leading Italian director pre- and post-war (*1860*, *4 Passi fra la Nuvole*); Alistair MacLean, much-filmed author of adventure yarns (*The Guns of Navarone*, *Ice Station Zebra*); Fyfe Robertson and Wynford Vaughan Thomas, both broadcasters of renown; Carlos Clarens, author and critic; William Rose, American writer of some distinguished British comedies (*Genevieve*, *The Ladykillers*); Sir Hugh Greene, Director-General of the BBC 1960-69; David Susskind, purposeful producer (*A Man Is Ten Feet Tall*, *Buffalo Bill and the Indians*); Andy Warhol; Norman Wilson, original supremo of the Edinburgh Festival; Esmond Knight, actor, notably for Powell and Pressburger; James Coco, hard-working comic actor (*Such Good Friends*, *The Wild Party*); Anny Ondra, visually, if not aurally, the heroine of Hitchcock's *Blackmail*; Joan Greenwood.

MARCH: Randolph Scott; Danny Kaye; Henri Decae, cameraman (*Le Silence de la Mer*, *Les 400 Coups*); Waldo Salt, scriptwriter, blacklisted for many years (*Rachel and the Stranger*, *Midnight Cowboy*); Andrew C. Meyer, underground film-maker and writer; Richard Levinson, writer/producer in harness with partner William Link; David Lewis, Hollywood producer (*Arch of Triumph*, *Raintree County*); Bernhard Grzimek, maker of wildlife documentaries (*No Room for Wild Animals*, *Serengeti Shall Not Die*); Emile Meyer, rasping character actor, the range boss in *Shane*, the corrupt cop in *Sweet Smell of Success*; Arch Oboler, American radio's great auteur, with a few cinematic endeavours (*Bwana Devil*, *The Bubble*); John Fernhout (Ferno), Dutch documentarist; Robert Preston, tightlipped 40s player vitalised by *The Music Man*; William Bowers, versatile scriptwriter (*The Gunfighter*, *Tight Spot*).

APRIL: Harry Watt, no-nonsense film-maker first with the GPO (*North Sea*) then at Ealing (*The Overlanders*); Erskine Caldwell, bestselling author (*God's Little Acre*), occasional documentary writer (*People of the Cumberland*); Salvatore Argento, whose company produced many of his son Dario's films; Robert Favre le Bret, i/c the Cannes Film Festival since 1947.

MAY: Paul Groesse, art director at MGM; Colin Blakely, pugnacious actor (*Charlie Bubbles*, *Equus*) most at home on the stage; Aubrey Baring, producer, partner in Mayflower Films

Joan Greenwood (*Whisky Galore*), Mary Astor (*The Maltese Falcon*), Hermione Gingold (*Gigi*).

(*South of Algiers*, *They Who Dare*); Rita Hayworth; Hermione Gingold; Peter Coe, theatre director, occasionally found behind the camera (*Lock Up Your Daughters*); Howard Shoup, costume designer; John Abraham, left-wing Indian film-maker (*Donkey in a Brahmin Village*, *Report to Mother*).

JUNE: Curt McDowell, amateur of homoerotica (*Thundercrack*, *Loads*); Will Sampson, the towering Chief Bromden of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; Fulton McKay, droll Scots player (*Gumshoe*, *Local Hero*); Madge Kennedy, leading lady of early silents; Elizabeth Hartman, willowy 60s star (*The Group*, *You're a Big Boy Now*); Vera Caspary, novelist (*Laura*) and scriptwriter (*A Letter to Three Wives*); Geraldine Page; William Crespinel, inventor of the Cinecolor process; Fred Astaire; Jackie Gleason, alias, indelibly, Minnesota Fats; Marguerite Houllé-Renoir, cutter, longtime companion of Jean Renoir.

JULY: William Wiard, director of many *Rockford Files* episodes, of *Tom Horn* for the big screen; Jerry Livingston, bandleader/composer, co-wrote 'Mairzy Doats', scored Disney's *Cinderella*; Viola Dana, silent star; Vilis Lapenieks, cameraman (*Night Tide*, *Cisco Pike*); Alan Gibson, prolific TV director who also made some Hammer horrors; Hugh Wheeler, writer and librettist (*Travels with My Aunt*, *A Little Night Music*); Alfie Bass, who seldom strayed, cinematically, far from the East End (*The Bespoke Overcoat*, *A Kid for Two Farthings*); Claude Winter, whose Sofracima company produced *La Guerre est Finie*; Richard Egan, beefy Fox star of the 1950s; Arthur J. Bressan Jr, militantly gay film-maker (*Buddies*, *Coming Out*); McDonald Hobley, dinner-jacketed star presenter of early British television.

AUGUST: Pola Negri; Joseph E. Levine, producer/showman, founder of Embassy Films (*The Carpetbaggers*, *The Lion in Winter*); Raquel Torres, Mexican actress in Hollywood (*White Shadows of the South Seas*, *Duck Soup*); Clarence Brown; Fernando Ramos Da Silva, child star of *Pixote*, shot while allegedly attempting a hold-up; Robert L. Jacks, producer at Fox; John Huston; Lee Marvin.

SEPTEMBER: Richard Marquand, director (*Return of the Jedi*, *Jagged Edge*); Quinn Martin, whose name is ringingly declaimed over the credits of his various TV shows (*The FBI*, *Streets of San Francisco*); Lorne Greene, Canadian actor, star of the long-running *Bonanza* series; John Qualen whose 'By Yiminey' Swede was seen to best advantage in *The Long Voyage Home*; Mervyn LeRoy; Leon Hirszman, prominent director of Brazil's Cinema Novo movement; Bob Fosse; Emlyn Williams; Mary Astor; Edgar Anstey, pillar of the documentary establishment; Claire Johnston, feminist film critic.

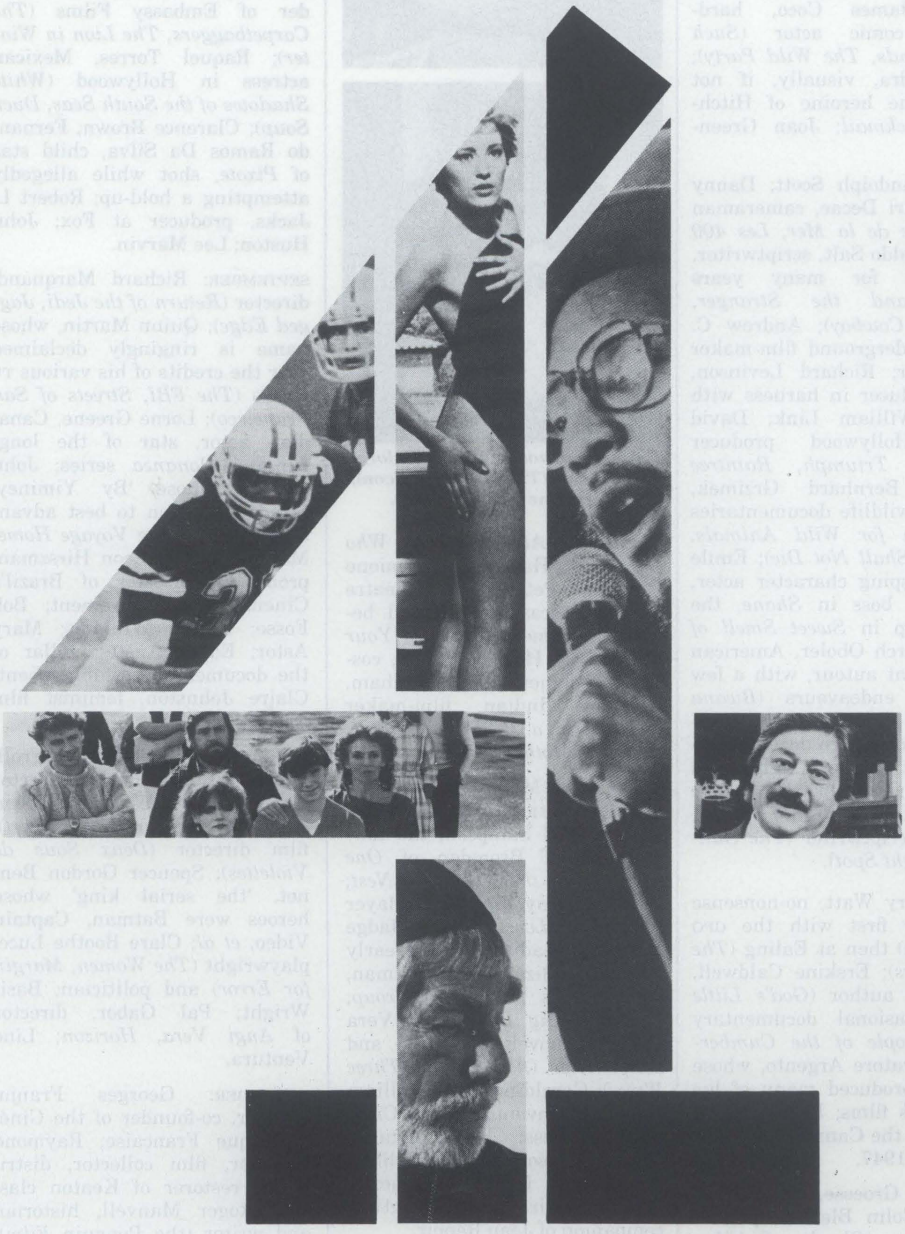
OCTOBER: Madeleine Carroll; Russell Rouse, writer/director (*The Well*, *The Thief*); Jean Anouilh, playwright (*Becket*), film director (*Deux Sous de Violettes*); Spencer Gordon Bennet, 'the serial king' whose heroes were Batman, Captain Video, *et al*; Clare Boothe Luce, playwright (*The Women*, *Margin for Error*) and politician; Basil Wright; Pal Gabor, director of *Angi Vera*, *Horizon*; Lino Ventura.

NOVEMBER: Georges Franju, director, co-founder of the Cinémathèque Française; Raymond Rohauer, film collector, distributor, restorer of Keaton classics; Roger Manvell, historian and writer (the Penguin *Film*); Helen Scott, publicist of the New Wave; Irene Handl.

Compiled by BOB BAKER

David Docherty & David Morrison

'...somewhat different, but not too different'



One can always trust Channel 4 to do the unexpected. During a period when most television companies are sensibly keeping their heads down in case the government notices them, Channel 4 asked the Broadcasting Research Unit to conduct an independent survey of public attitudes to the channel for its fifth anniversary on 2 November 1987. This could have turned out to be a spectacular own goal; a bit like the poor stiff who tried to commit suicide by tying a noose around his neck, fixing the other end to the top of a cliff, drinking some poison and setting his clothes alight. As he jumped, he tried to shoot himself in the head; unfortunately, the bullet cut the rope and he fell into the sea; the salt water promptly put out the flames and he vomited up the poison. Fortunately, he died of exposure. Any channel which exposes itself to the scrutiny of the public can discover similarly that, no matter how many precautions it has taken, the audience's judgment might not be predictable.

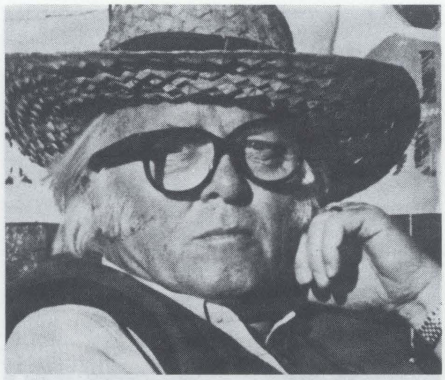
Before turning to that judgment, let us remind ourselves of the complexity of the demands placed on Channel 4. It was born in conflict and raised in aggression. Like every British institution in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it had to deal with the collapse of political and cultural consensus and the pervading sense of doom about the fragmentation of British social life. The combined challenges of Scottish and Welsh nationalism, the troubles in Northern Ireland, the development of a powerful and committed left in the Labour Party and the trade unions, the rise of Thatcherism in the Conservative Party, the emergence of the National Front, and the articulation of Black and

Asian ethnic politics (which, in some cases, erupted into riots) left the old order reeling. Britain was experiencing a social drama which might have become a tragedy.

In 1982, the year of the channel's birth, Ralf Dahrendorf, then Director of the London School of Economics, wrote of the growing 'sense of anomie, of lawlessness and isolation' in Britain. Searching for a reason, he suggested: 'Modernity has at last caught up with Britain . . . The traditional ligatures of family and class, religion and place of origin no longer bind.' When it began broadcasting on 2 November 1982, Channel 4 symbolised the complications of responding culturally to this social disintegration.

When we interviewed him for our book on Channel 4, William Whitelaw, Home Secretary in the 1979 Thatcher government, told us that he wanted the channel to siphon off some of the feelings among minorities that they were not being adequately represented in the nation's cultural institutions. 'If you are Home Secretary in any government,' Whitelaw noted, 'you are going to take the view that there are a lot of minority interests in this country (for example) different races. If they don't get some outlet for their activities, you are going to run yourself into more trouble. I just thought it right that they should have more chance. I just wanted to open the thing out rather more broadly than it had been before—a channel that was somewhat different, but not too different. If you wanted it to be very different you would have struck it away from the IBA altogether. I think one always had that sort of safeguard at the back of one's mind.'

Just as Whitelaw regarded the channel as an opportunity to meet pressing cultural needs, so others wanted it to take television by the scruff of the neck and open it up to a range of different



Sir Richard Attenborough, Chairman of Channel 4.

voices. At the 1979 Edinburgh International Television Festival, Jeremy Isaacs outlined his aims for the channel: 'I hope in the 1980s to see more black Britons on our screens in programmes of particular appeal to them and aimed at us; more programmes made for women which men will watch; more programmes for the young, for the age group that watches television least, partly because so little television speaks to them.' In his reflections for the fifth anniversary, Anthony Smith, the intellectual father of the channel, praised it for 'adding to the life of this society . . . I mean not just to television. [It has contributed to] the sense of opportunities, recognition of groups and communities, and a sense of involvement among people who are outside the discourse of television as a whole.'

Channel 4 bore the hopes of many that television might be able to address the range of needs, values, demands, interests and cultures which make up Britain in the 1980s. Has it succeeded in the view of the people who matter most—the audience?

On the basis of forty-four discussion groups throughout Britain and across age, sex and race ranges, as well as a national survey, we can say that the public believes Channel 4 has an important contribution to make to British society as well as to British television. More than two-thirds approved of the channel's commitment to special interests and minorities (see Table 1) There are two main reasons for this level of support: people have special interests of their own which the channel has satisfied; and, secondly, the majority of the public believes that television should do more than simply entertain. The audience thinks that television should inform, experiment, challenge and create interests, as well as provide sit coms, soap opera and feature films. We tried to map the level of commitment to public service television by asking people to construct their own television system, choosing two stations from four possible options.

1: **Channel W** *(Mixed)*
News,
Soap Opera,
Chat Shows,
Religious Programmes,
Sports,
Current Affairs,
Plays,
Feature Films,
Nature Programmes,
Travel Shows,
Documentaries.

2: **Channel X** *(Specialist)*
Sports only, or
News only, or
Films only, or
Music only, or
Children's Programmes only.

3: **Channel Y** *(Entertainment)*
Situation Comedies,
Soap Operas,
Game Shows,
Chat Shows,
Women's Programmes,
Crafts.

4: **Channel Z** *(Minority)*
Ethnic,
Trade,
Business,
Hobbies,
Specialist.

The majority opts for a system with a mass-appeal channel—programmes in which everyone might be interested—

TABLE 1

Channel 4 has a policy of allowing minority groups and people not normally seen on television to state their case. How much do you approve or disapprove of this policy?

		SEX		AGE					CLASS				ETHNIC ORIGIN		
	TOTAL	Male	Female	16–20	21–24	25–34	35–54	55+	AB	C1	C2	DE	White	Afro-Carib	Asian
	974	431	543	109	57	149	334	325	199	235	256	284	948	117	119
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Approve a lot	27	29	25	29	26	30	29	23	39	27	24	21	26	59	52
Approve a little	41	40	42	42	40	38	43	41	37	45	38	44	42	25	29
Neither	16	15	16	16	19	20	13	16	12	11	20	18	15	5	9
Disapprove a little	8	9	8	11	7	9	7	9	7	9	9	8	8	3	3
Disapprove a lot	5	4	5	1	4	3	5	6	3	3	7	5	5	1	–
Don't know	3	3	4	1	4	1	4	6	4	4	3	4	4	7	6

and a minority channel, which appeals to those elements in each of us which differentiate us from our neighbours. Channel W, which is similar to BBC1 or ITV, is nominated as the most important by the vast majority (84 per cent), followed by Channel X, the specialist channel (58 per cent), Channel Y, which is populist entertainment (26 per cent), and, finally, Channel Z, aimed at minority and special interests (25 per cent).

The public wants television to be more than a luxury or a simple comforter to help pass the time. Channel 4's appeal lies, in part at least, in the way it fits in with people's desire to be seen as good citizens committed to more than their own pleasure. The public is not yet ready to privatise its conscience.

Apart from this broad commitment to the channel, what else does the public think? On the basis of our research, there appear to be four types of Channel 4 viewer. The first likes the channel because it is different from the rest of British television. These are the viewers of *Eleventh Hour*, the *Bandung File*, the documentary and arts strands, etc. The second type dislikes the channel for the same reason; they do not want television to celebrate or even acknowledge social or cultural differences. This type seldom watches the channel's specialist programmes. Thirdly, we have those who like Channel 4 because it shows the same kind of programmes as the rest of British television. Regular viewers of *Cheers*, *Brookside*, *Film on Four*, *Hill Street Blues*, *American Football*, etc, tend to fall into this category. Finally, there are those who dislike the channel because they feel it has not really provided a breakthrough in the form or content of television. Roughly, we can say that about one-third of the population has strong feelings about the channel, whereas the rest are more or less glad that it exists but will tend not to watch many of its programmes.

Jeremy Isaacs, Channel 4's first Chief Executive.

Some people in the discussion groups perfectly summed up these views. One not so enthusiastic member of the public noted: 'The other night I turned to something [on C4] and it suddenly came on and they had blue hair, and I looked at it, and: "Oh what the hell is that?"... there was no encouragement at all to watch it. [I thought] Oh well, that's 4, I'll go and finish the painting.' A more committed viewer stated: 'Usually C4 has something that is eye-catching and interesting and worth a debate the next day at work. I think that the three main channels which existed before C4 . . . tended to mollycoddle us as viewers . . . it is very refreshing to be able to watch a channel that leaves it up to you to decide what you want to see.'

Censorship

The audience consistently raised three main issues when discussing Channel 4: sex and censorship, minorities and special interests and, finally, the nature of polemical television. On the first issue, the public by and large praises the channel for encouraging viewers to take responsibility for their own viewing. In particular, Channel 4's 'Special Discretion Required' symbol—the famous red triangle—was approved by more than nine out of ten people. The audience is relatively happy with the appearance of nudity or sex as long as it is clearly signalled and put in context. For instance, whereas two-thirds are happy with the appearance of a topless woman in a documentary about a strip club, less than one-third would find this acceptable in a situation comedy. This was also true of full-frontal nudity and the depiction of sexual activity. It would seem sex on television requires a serious context.

For all the seriousness of the issue, and the powerful feeling among the public that it does not want an overly censorious television régime, there is an element of the *Carry On* films or Donald McGill's seaside postcards in viewers' attitudes. In the course of a prolonged debate about the representation of sex and the nature of censorship, a middle-class Glasgow woman laughed and said: 'Well, I ought to start watching C4. I'm missing a lot if it's all bottoms and bosums.' The old joke about such women is that they think sex is something in which coal is carried, and the delicacy with which this woman spoke of 'bosums' is delightful. But there is a serious point underlying this. Those advocating an extension of censorship rely on stereotypes of outraged viewers. That famous person 'Disgusted from Tunbridge Wells' should be of the same class and outlook as 'Nauseated of Newton Mearns', but, as this woman demonstrates, one should not assume moral positions on the basis of age or social class. The proposed Broadcasting Standards Council cannot presume that they have a mandate from the public.

TABLE 2

If a programme is only watched by a very few people who really enjoy it, it should be replaced by something more popular. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

		SEX		AGE					CLASS				ETHNIC ORIGIN				
	TOTAL	Male	Female	16–20	21–24	25–34	35–54	55+	AB	C1	C2	DE	White	Afro-Carib	Asian	MISS	C4 A LOT
	974	431	543	109	57	149	334	325	199	235	256	284	948	117	119	158	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Definitely agree	10	8	11	10	12	9	10	10	5	10	9	13	10	24	17	8	
Tend to agree	34	35	34	38	33	36	30	37	25	33	41	36	34	32	35	30	
Neither	5	5	5	7	5	7	6	2	5	6	6	3	5	7	9	4	
Tend to disagree	35	33	37	37	35	39	37	32	40	38	32	33	35	23	27	35	
Definitely disagree	13	16	11	6	12	9	15	15	24	11	9	10	13	12	9	22	
Don't know	3	2	3	2	2	1	3	5	2	2	2	5	3	2	3	2	

An area which is of concern to most people is swearing on television. Swearing is such an imitative phenomenon, and one where the sources of learning can be fairly easily identified, that one could reasonably expect television to play a leading role. Yet, here again, people do not attribute as much influence to television (32 per cent) as they do to other children in school (51 per cent), family (37 per cent) or other children out of school (34 per cent).

This is not to say that people do not object to swearing, rather that this is something different from their perception of the imitative power of television. Those who object to swearing on television in all probability object to anyone swearing in their home. There are strict rules about the use of 'bad' language in most households, which also express concern about the nature of relationships: if a granddaughter swears in front of, or at, her grandmother, then she is disrespectful. Even if someone is alone in the house, they might be shocked by swearing, because they themselves would never use that language in the house (or even sometimes just in that room).

Language, as ever, is about social relationships as much as about the simple meaning of the words. If one believes that the home is somehow a place where 'good' behaviour constitutes what one means by being 'home', then swearing on television can be immensely disorienting. One's own identity is disturbed if one listens to (and therefore condones) swearing in one's own living-room. Television crosses the boundaries of important social relationships when swearing occurs in a programme; therefore, swearing worries people more than, say, topless female nudity. For this reason, swearing is the only area where a large portion of the population is concerned about the effect television has on behaviour.

To sum up: the public has sophisticated techniques for understanding the relationship between television and the social world. They do not condemn the 'box in the corner' for crimes which they feel it has not committed; at the worst it is regarded as a petty criminal. One antidote to counter the persistent claims of the excessive censors was humour. For example, one old lady who complained that in many programmes 'they've no sooner met than they're in bed,' was put down by another pensioner who said, 'You're only jealous.'

Minorities

The public also picked up on Channel 4's special mandate to serve minorities. On this, the majority was fundamentally tolerant. A Glasgow woman summed

Michael Grade, the incoming Chief Executive.

up the prevailing view: 'Everybody has a right to a say.' It would appear from our research that the channel has either convinced most people that specialist and minority-oriented television is important, or that it has tapped into feelings about human rights and representation which existed before it. Either way, the channel has the backing of the majority in its orientation toward new voices and experiences.

Channel 4 is now being regarded by the public from a position of a new social order. Most people have settled (albeit unwillingly) for a multi-ethnic society, and generalise about the effects of ethnic or minority television from the basis of their experience of such a society. That experience has led white people to be sympathetic to ethnic television—although of a very marginalised kind—and to ethnic and sexual minorities tempering their demands on television because of a realisation that television does not fundamentally change their lot.

The backdrop to the public's attitudes about minority television is its commitment to public service television (which inherently appeals to tolerance), and the range of special interests which people themselves have. By and large, the public is committed to experimental television, or at least to the idea that programmes should be transmitted which might appeal to only a few people (Table 2).

Ethnic groups qualify for TV airtime on two counts: they are part of the population and acceptable according to the principle that everyone has a right to a say; and they are acceptable because they have distinctive cultures which television should serve. The caveat entered by the public is that minority programmes should not appear in prime time nor on the two main channels. Praise for Channel 4 has to be seen in this context: the channel allows people to have a social conscience without pain. Even that social conscience fails, though, when programmes for homosexuals are mentioned. When asked with what regularity homosexuals should have a programme on Channel 4, six out of ten said: None. Homosexuality is the ultimate test of tolerance and it seems that most people fail gladly.

Polemical TV

The final area which concerned people was that of polemical or opinionated television. Channel 4 has made great demands on the public's ability to discern political or cultural bias. The channel's assertion that it seeks to balance programmes over its whole output assumes a politically aware and television-literate audience capable of not confusing fact and value. Or, more precisely, with the ability to suspend judgment on the presentation of facts unless, and until, they watch a balancing programme at some later date. On the evidence of our research, the channel has the competent audience it requires.

The public is, however, developing its views about balance in ways which even Channel 4 will find surprising. We have discovered that the audience is happy with the idea of television which is forceful, assertive and stringent, and has moved away from the simple belief in the meticulous balancing of one programme by its opposite. But people are not happy with the notion that someone with contentious views should be allowed to make unchallenged assertions. The public wants Channel 4, and television in general, to own up to the complexity of the social world; it recognises that confusion reigns supreme in most political and moral debates and it would like to hear as many voices as possible. This recognition of pluralism is at the heart of the public's unease with aspects of polemical television, as well as its determination that Channel 4 should not take the easy way out and restore traditional programme balance.

Jeremy Isaacs once said that he did not want Channel 4 to become the conscience of the IBA. In some ways, however, the channel has become the television public's conscience. People who will seldom watch an experimental or innovative programme think that the channel is wonderful for putting on such programmes at 11 o'clock on a Tuesday night. No matter the reasoning behind public support—and, as we have shown, it is complex—the channel is welcomed by the public and any attempts to change its character over the next two years must recognise this important fact. ■

LONDON FILM FESTIVAL '87

Long Live the Ladies

ALAN STANBROOK

Winding up the 30th London Film Festival in 1986, Anthony Smith, Director of the British Film Institute, quipped that he had been delighted that the retiring festival director had found room for an Australian comedy called *Malcolm*, adding that he fully expected the next festival to feature an Australian feminist piece called *Sheila*. None took the crack better than Sheila Whitaker, who slid into the hot seat in 1987, almost took him at his word and, by and large, can feel proud of her first year in the job.

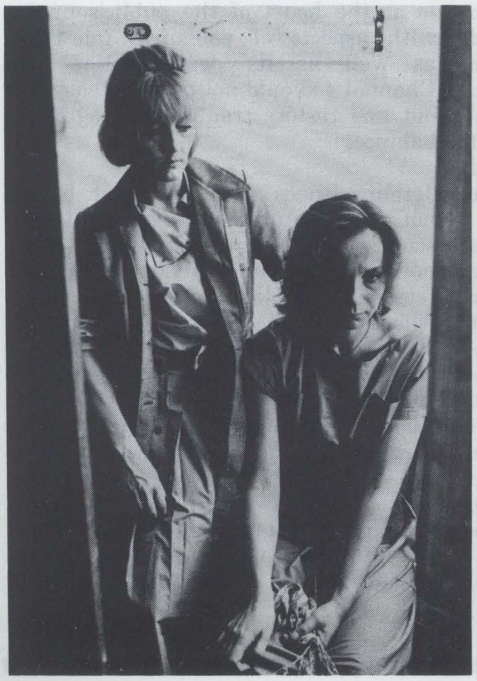
No festival, of course, can be better than the films made in that year and sometimes not as good as that. The vagaries of distribution robbed London of a number of pictures Ms Whitaker wanted to show, among them *Sous le Soleil de Satan*, Louis Malle's Venice prize winner *Au revoir, les enfants* and the new Bertolucci, *The Last Emperor*. But inadvertent omissions? Not many. Michael Cimino's *The Sicilian*, perhaps, Abel Ferrara's *China Girl* and Lindsay Anderson's *The Whales of August*. Otherwise, pretty much a full house. And there's still the surprise film slot (these lines have to be written before that mystery, happily taken over from the Derek Malcolm festival years, is unveiled).

One of the fascinations of a catch-all festival like London's, coming at the end of the year, is to see how far it is governed by common themes and preoccupations cutting across national boundaries and how far it mirrors the personal tastes of its director. Obsession of the year worldwide in 1987 was undoubtedly a good nosh. Directors from as far afield as Denmark, Italy and Japan have muscled in on the territory that used to be Claude Chabrol's alone. The one who comes closest to filming food *à la* Chabrol is Ermanno Olmi. His *Long Live the Lady!* is a social satire and an exposé of bourgeois eating habits every bit as piquant as Chabrol in his prime. From Japan, *Tampopo* (discussed elsewhere in this issue) sees food as a sexual surrogate and, most astonishingly of all, *Babette's Feast* from the Danish director Gabriel Axel finds in *haute cuisine* a reflection of the grace of God.

The feature of the 31st London Film Festival that most conspicuously marked a new captain at the helm was the accent on women—both in terms of subject matter and authorship. Some eighteen films (more if you count shorts) were directed by women and almost as many were chiefly about them. (One, Gillian Armstrong's new film, was, indeed, about an Australian sheila, though, pace Anthony Smith, it was called *High Tide*.)

Spain fielded two women's pictures this year—Mario Camus' adaptation of the Lorca play, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, and a striking melodrama from Jordi Cadena, *La Senyora*. The trouble with the Lorca film is that it belongs to a tradition of tasteful adaptation that modern cinema has largely left behind. This is the kind of film that begins and ends with a curtain to emphasise its theatrical origins and in between relies on high-class acting and fine, textured photography to disguise the fact that the play has not really been rethought as cinema. What's lacking is the individual way of looking at things that Cocteau, for example, brought to the film of his own *Les Parents Terribles* or even Wyler and Toland to *The Little Foxes*. Forget the language and you might imagine this *Bernarda Alba* had been shot by Sidney Lumet.

La Senyora is in a different league. Adapted by the actress Silvia Tortosa from a 1979 novel by Antoni Mus, it is a gripping study of sexual repression and the way it can warp the mind and soul.



Lonely Woman Seeks Lifetime Companion.

***La Senyora*: Silvia Tortosa.**

Married against her will to a much older man, the heroine has to adjust to his distaste for the sexual act and preference for a form of conjugal artificial insemination (his wedding gift is a gold thimble which will nightly contain the semen with which he hopes to father an heir). Handsomely photographed, *La Senyora* is, like much modern Spanish cinema, frank and explicit about the byways of sex but free of prurience: Jordi Cadena, one feels, has the generosity and sympathy of a Buñuel. And if the movie keeps a scorpion in its tail, that's because doing dreadful things to people is apt in the end to turn them into dreadful people, too. By the end, the girl, now middle-aged and widowed, has become the monster her husband was in life.

Dreadful things, of course, can be done to people out of the best motives—witness the Argentine film *Gerónima*, based on the true story of an Indian woman living in poverty and squalor who was rehabilitated, along with her many children, only to suffer disorientation in hospital, extreme mental breakdown and the death of most of her family from ailments contracted while they were in care. Shot on less than a shoestring by Raúl Tosso, *Gerónima* is understandably rough and ready as a piece of film-making.

What it does have is a scrupulous honesty and refusal to jump to pat conclusions. Gerónima's life may seem insupportable to educated liberals, but it is one whose ground rules she understands, whereas civilisation to her seems as inhospitable as the moon. Perhaps in her situation there is no solution short of more fundamental changes to society. Tosso's film makes use in the closing stages of tapes of the real-life Gerónima Sande, taken during a psychiatric examination prior to her death. It is a tribute to the actress, Luisa Calcumil, who plays the central role, that we have until then barely been aware that this is not *cinéma-vérité*.

It's been more than seven years since the Mauretanian director Med Hondo last made a movie. *Sarraounia*, shot in Burkina Faso with French financial assistance, is the story of an African Boadicea, a nineteenth-century queen who led her people against the French colonial armies, defeated them and proclaimed a state of harmony beyond race and creed. It's a parable that locates immortality in the name that a man (or a woman) will leave behind after death and the songs that will be sung to keep that name alive. The film is frankly partisan: the occupying French troops are shown as unremittingly cruel and callous. But the film has power and conviction and is shot with great sophistication and a flair for using the CinemaScope screen. The scene in which the French troops are tricked out of the safety of their fort and cut down in the field is the best cinematic depiction of military tactics since *Spartacus*. Graced with a haunting musical score that draws on both indigenous and western melodic forms, *Sarraounia* is one of the best recent films from Africa.

Feminine themes have also featured strongly in some of the films from Asia. Ichikawa's *Actress* is not, regrettably, the return to form for which one might have hoped. It is not, indeed, much cop at all, but for film buffs it is a fascinating account of the life of the actress Kinuyo Tanaka, whose career, stretching back to the silent era, reached its peak in the last great films of Kenji Mizoguchi. A rapid voice-over guide to Japanese film history is used as a running commentary to her succcessive involvements, personal and professional, with three of the country's prominent film-makers—Shimizu, Gosho and ultimately Mizoguchi.

Tanaka emerges as a star of tremendous ambition, but what Ichikawa does not show, partly because his leading lady is a performer of altogether less talent, is the unique and heart-rending quality of Tanaka's acting. To see her in *O Haru* or Kinoshita's *Army* is to experience some of the finest acting in Japanese cinema. This is not apparent from Ichikawa's somewhat trivial account of her life, which stops short before her own, not undistinguished ventures into direction.

Surrogate Woman is the lesser of two South Korean films in the festival from the prolific Im Kwon-taek. The story of a village virgin pressed into service to bear a child for a nobleman whose wife is barren, it follows fairly predictable lines, with the couple falling in love, the baby snatched from its mother at birth and the grief-stricken girl hanging herself in despair. Filmed in the magnificent colour that first drew attention to Korean costume pictures, the film is a visual treat, but the material is thin and overstretched at 95 minutes. The director is on surer ground with *Gilsodom*, about the reuniting of families separated during the Korean war. Gilsodom itself is a Korean town that now lies over the border in the north and the implicit theme of the film is the reunification of the nation as a whole, a goal for which many South Koreans yearn emotionally while recognising its practical impossibility.

Taiwan had three strong pictures this year, of which the best, Edward Yang's *The Terroriser*, has already been discussed by Tony Rayns from Locarno and needs no further commendation here. Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Dust in the Wind* improves on acquaintance. At first viewing, its tale of a young village boy growing up and transferring to the city and eventually to the army for military training seems over-familiar—another rites-of-passage story from a director who has ploughed that furrow once too often. What is new about the film, however, and augurs well for the future

Dust in the Wind.

***Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle*: Joëlle Miquel, Jessica Forde.**

is the touching scene in which the conscripts rescue, reassure and befriend a boatload of shipwrecked mainland fishermen mortally afraid of accepting food from the Taiwanese lest it has been poisoned. In this sequence, Hou sheds the somewhat myopic quality of his recent work to entertain wider sympathies. Visually, however, *Dust in the Wind* is as artful as any of his pictures. The main elements of his style are now crystallising: a preference for extreme long shot, which gives his films the lyrical quality found in the finest work of Mizoguchi, and a penchant for still-lifes (often, in this film, of station clocks), which punctuate the drama rather like comparable images in Ozu. What he needs now is the challenge of a new theme or a new way of tackling old ones.

Chang Yi has so far managed to ring the changes with some skill on just one theme—the plight of women in Taiwan. The three films he has made with the actress Yang Huishan (*Jade Love, Kueimei, a Woman* and now *This Love of Mine*) are distinguished by outstanding performances and, in the latest, an almost tangible sense of life closing in on his heroine. This genre, in which a wife is deserted by her husband in favour of a younger mistress, used to be the regular stamping ground for Joan Crawford. The question remains whether the triteness of the material is transcended by the director's masterly control of pacing, composition and depth of feeling. The jury is still out on that one, though it's worth remembering that *Madame Bovary* might not sound like much if you just tell the plot.

None of the anguish of these eastern heroines is to be seen in those festival films from the west that grappled with women's lives and themes. Having, in 1970, put Hetty King on film while there was still time, movie critic David Robinson, with Stephen Garrett from Channel 4, has now set the camera up before Elisabeth Welch at the Almeida theatre and left her to weave her spell for just over an hour. In films like this everything depends on the performer and the director's task is to keep as low a profile as possible. Fortunately, Miss Welch, after 64 years in showbusiness, is still in good voice and good humour. Spiced with reminiscences, tantalising clips from the few films she made, much ribald singing and a torrent of anecdotes, *Keeping Love Alive* is an engaging tribute to an entertainer the British film industry never really had the courage to employ.

Eric Rohmer's *Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle* stands outside the 'Comedies and Proverbs' cycle (of which the last, *L'ami de mon amie*, has yet to reach England). And yet it bears a family likeness, perhaps too close for comfort, to *The Green Ray*. It's a loosely assembled collage of four short stories, each involving two girls, Reinette and Mirabelle, who meet and become friends by chance one summer holiday. The most substantial story is almost a reprise of *The Green Ray*, with the girls getting up at dawn to experience the so called 'blue hour' just before daybreak when the sounds of night have ended and those of day have yet to begin. No reason, of course, why an artist should not repeat himself—Ozu and Howard Hawks did it all the time—but after an unbroken 25-year stream of originality and invention, it comes as a slight disappointment to find Rohmer staging an encore.

In the three other tales, Reinette and Mirabelle have to cope with a waiter who carries no change, a hustler with a neat line in conning cash out of railway travellers and the problem of selling a painting during a self-imposed one-day vow of silence. *Reinette and Mirabelle* is a bit like a plateful of canapés—tasty enough at the time, but no substitute for a full meal.

A lesson in how to turn a miniature into a very considerable movie is provided by Russian television director Vyacheslav Krishtofovich in *Lonely Woman Seeks Lifetime Companion*. How, if you are a middle-aged Russian lady with a love-life that's all in the quite distant past, do you set about meeting an eligible man? Not, it seems, through a computer-dating service but by sticking a notice on the nearest lamp-post. But the response is probably just as unnerving. In this case, Prince Charming proves to be a disreputable, drunken oaf who once performed in the circus. How, despite their apparent incompatibility, this odd couple comes to a form of mutual respect and affection makes for a film of great warmth and subtlety that has the good sense to leave the ending, like the door of the apartment in which it is chiefly set, intriguingly ajar.

One of the BFI's contributions to the festival, *On the Black Hill*, directed by Andrew Grieve from a novel by Bruce Chatwin, is a worthy companion piece to films like Peter Hall's *Akenfield* that try to capture the special qualities of the English countryside. Set on the Welsh border, it is a multi-generation study of the conflicts between Welsh and English, rich and poor, tradition and modernity across the social history of the twentieth century. Up to a point it is effective, but what's missing is that other strain in British writing about nature that is best reflected in the novels of Thomas Hardy and, in the cinema, in Michael Powell's *Gone to Earth*. These turn nature into a participant, generally malevolent, in the drama, conferring an extra mythic dimension to the story to which Andrew Grieve's nostalgic canter through the *Cavalcade* of the years scarcely aspires.

The Michael Powell approach—pantheistic, supercharged and highly idiosyncratic—never sat easily alongside the British realist tradition, of which the festival contained a superior example in Roger Graef's police corruption movie *Closing Ranks*. An unsparing account of prejudice and pig ignorance among some elements in the police force, it describes a conspiracy to misrepresent an incident in which an innocent hippie is brutally beaten by a cosh-happy copper. Graef's themes are the influence that a charismatic, but rogue policeman can have on his colleagues and the unacknowledged prevalence of domestic violence among police families. It is a disturbing picture, all too plausibly played by Rob Spendlove as the rotten apple.

When the LFF screening was followed by a symposium in which senior police officers took part, no voice was raised against the essential 'truth' of the conduct portrayed. In mounting these symposia (there was another after the screening of *Shattered Dreams*, about the modern role of Israel), the LFF does much to consolidate its reputation as a festival offering food for the mind as well as the fun its director urged us all to have. ■

Closing Ranks.

BASIL·WRIGHT

BASIL WRIGHT, who died on 14 October at the age of 80, was John Grierson's first recruit to what eventually became the British documentary movement. He was taken on, in a state of high elation, shortly after the famous screening of *Drifters* in November 1929.

Wright had recently come down from Cambridge, where he had already discovered the art of the cinema as a result of seeing Dupont's *Variety*, Hitchcock's *The Lodger* and Pudovkin's *Mother*. (He had remarkable recall of such detail as evidenced in his lively book based on sixty years of film-going, *The Long View*, published in 1974.) He had also persuaded his family to give him a 16mm camera and projector for his twenty-first birthday, and it was actually on the strength of his amateur work that he got the job. He would, however, approve of Grierson's name appearing in my first sentence, for his initial enthusiasm never faded and he deferred to Grierson as the dominant influence in his life from first to last.

Wright was a quiet intellectual, kind and considerate and extremely well-informed, not an obvious candidate for the cut-throat film industry of that (or any other) period. On the one hand, he might never have made it into professional film-making without the umbrella Grierson provided. On the other, it is conceivable that he contributed the one distinctive quality that actually put British documentary on the map.

Song of Ceylon was certainly the first real coup in five years of semi-amateur experimentation as far as the poetic use of film was concerned and, although

Wright always insisted that Grierson showed him finally how to perfect it, this was without any manner of doubt a film by Basil Wright. And the success of *Night Mail*, so crucial to the GPO film unit's subsequent inclusion in the history books, quite possibly owed at least as much to Basil Wright as to anybody else. *Pace* the whole argument about credits, the film could easily have passed unnoticed without the Auden verse, and it was Wright who introduced the poet to the unit in the first place.

After *Night Mail*, Grierson, who had bigger irons in the fire than the development of cinematic poetry, made all his favourite protégés give up directing for producing. As a consequence Basil Wright spent most of the war years producing films on how to dig trenches or boil potatoes, while less elevated and even less favoured people found themselves making *Western Approaches* and *Fires Were Started*. In addition to that, Wright was shipped out to Canada twice as Grierson's special envoy. Not surprisingly the *World in Action* and *Canada Carries On* series were being misunderstood in Whitehall, and Wright had the unenviable task of correcting the Ministry of Information's attitude on this. He was probably extremely good at it, for he could always see all round an argument and had exceptional diplomacy and tact.

In 1945-46 he was put in charge of the Crown Film Unit, producing among other things Jennings' *Diary for Timothy*, for which he expressed considerable fondness. Running a studio was anathema to him, however, and he finally told Grierson that he'd had enough. Grierson immediately conjured him into the MOI with the task of recommending what should happen there in peacetime. A Utopian report emerged, but the Treasury soon put paid to that.

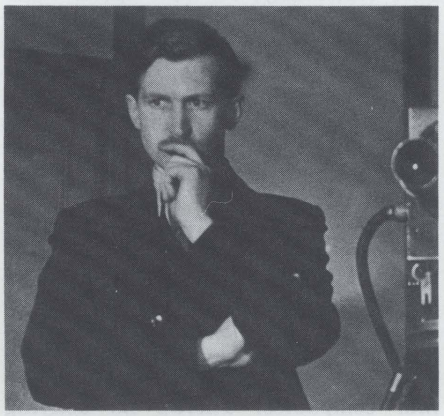
One way or another, Wright had little time to direct films until perhaps it was too late. His own favourites (apart from *Song of Ceylon*, which he always recognised as his best) were *Children at School* (1937) and *Waters of Time* (1950). The last third of his life was spent lecturing and writing. It might seem a sad story were it not that Wright himself embraced it with such evident delight and would probably never have been persuaded to alter even half a line of it.

EDGAR·ANSTEY

EDGAR ANSTEY died on 26 September, also at the age of 80. For him, too, early membership of Grierson's documentary team established allegiances that lasted all his life.

Anstey joined the EMB film unit in 1931 and was very soon despatched to Labrador to make a film in virtual ignorance of the process apart from half a day spent photographing statues from low angles in St James's Park. Such memories die hard.

His recollections of directing under the perfectionist regime were vivid (and hilarious) to the end—clambering 450 feet up the Droitwich mast ('I think if it hadn't been for Grierson, I would have questioned the wisdom of doing it'), attempting on three separate occasions at three different sites to please the maestro with a very simple shot of a stone being put on to a parapet ('I mean, you didn't ever say, it can't be done'). But these particular struggles were short-lived. From 1934 his role was



mainly as a documentary producer.

In 1935 he co-produced with Arthur Elton *Housing Problems*, which remains the movement's most arresting piece of social reportage. It was in Grierson's view the real beginning of *cinéma-vérité*, and almost as remarkable was the fact that the gas industry sponsored it. The following year *Enough to Eat?* (similarly sponsored, and directed by Anstey) tackled the subject of malnutrition in a way that might seem reasonably modern on television today.

From 1937 to 1939 Anstey worked with the *March of Time* in New York and in London. Then, like Basil Wright, he spent the war years producing umpteen propaganda films on a wide variety of topics relating to the national effort.

Producing suited Anstey, however, and his best legacy is probably the work of the British Transport film unit, which he set up in 1949 and headed until his retirement in 1974. Here it must have been a considerable satisfaction to be able to ensure that the high standards of integrity and craftsmanship, which he himself enjoyed so much, were not relegated to past history but scrupulously handed on.

ELIZABETH SUSSEX

Getting It Taped

PHILIP KEMP

Reports of the collapse of the video boom, like those of Mark Twain's death, seem to be something of an exaggeration. In 1986, according to the British Videogram Association, we spent £425m on pre-recorded videotapes—hiring them or buying them outright—which was an all-time record. As was the year before, and the year before that, and so on back. Fifty-five per cent of British homes now have a VCR, and purchases of those show no signs of falling off, either.

Each year, the BVA (trade association for the major video distributors) hands out awards to the year's top-selling video films. The 1987 winner looks like being *'Crocodile' Dundee*, already overhauling the previous favourite, *Top Gun*. Within three weeks of its release on tape, *Dundee* had sold 60,000 copies to retail shops, and taken £3m in rentals. Nationally, we now spend three times as much in renting (or buying) videos as on going to the cinema, and any given release will be seen by far more viewers in their own homes than on the big screen. If numbers are what count, then video has become decisively the norm; movies, for most people, now mean video.

All of which might seem to spell unalloyed rejoicing to the video industry; but not necessarily. 'It seems a pity,' says Norman Abbott of the BVA, 'and as an old film man, I take no pleasure in it. Nor do our members, who are mainly the video offshoots of major film companies. There's no denying people are getting a lesser experience. But it's no good saying that they *ought* to see films in the cinema; they have decided video is more convenient, and we can't quarrel with that. They stopped going to the cinema before video came on the scene. We may have added another twist to the spiral, but the trend was there.'

Also, quite apart from aesthetic considerations, the video industry needs the cinema. 'We know that if a video is successful, it's because it has done well as a cinema film. That's where it gets the advance publicity, the word-of-mouth. Take *Dundee*. Only a comparatively small number of people have bothered to see it in the cinema; but it caused so much talk that, now it's available on video, they all want to see it. But if there had been no cinemas, no word-of-mouth, and we had had to sell it from scratch, it would have been far less successful.'

Not that all hit videos derive from movie-house smashes. There's TV material, of course (from *Fawlty Towers* to the *Official History of Liverpool Football Club*), and the occasional top-selling 'instructional' video, such as *Jane Fonda's New Workout*. But even a box-office turkey can sometimes pick up respectable rental sales, just on the curiosity factor—Lew Grade's nemesis, *Raise the Titanic*, for example. And then there are the notorious 'nasties', *Driller Killer* and the like, which, as Hitchcock said of television, have 'brought violence back into the home where it belongs.' Rental figures at this seedy end of the market are harder to come by, but lack of cinematic exposure is unlikely to have discouraged purchasers.

These days, the great majority of films released in Britain never see the inside of a movie house at all. Last year the BBFC issued certificates for some 350 movies and about 4,500 videos. A good many of those, of course, were not mainstream cinema material—TV programmes, pop videos, instructionals, ethnic films (foreign-language without English subtitles), plus a backlog of old movies resubmitted for video classification. Even so, and at the lowest estimate, that leaves around 700 recent feature films a year released solely on videotape. Not expressly made for video—

very few feature films are—but unable to get a release in Britain any other way. The two major circuits are increasingly choosy, the independent cinemas know pretty well what their audiences want; but video, as Norman Abbott says, 'is less discriminating, and has many more outlets. So there is nearly always some guy who will acquire the rights—I can't imagine there is *anything* that there isn't going to be some British buyer for.'

Most dealers, though, have grown more sophisticated since the early, 'gold-rush' days of video. 'They look at the title, they ask about advertising support, who the stars are—they may even watch it before they buy it.' Retailers, too, have become cannier; no longer do sad little 'video clubs' mushroom and die on every street corner. A few of those naïve pioneers, however, did strike it lucky. 'Some of them had an instinctive business sense, and learned as they went along. There are video millionaires who were long-distance lorry-drivers eight or nine years ago. Now they own a chain of 20-odd shops—or have been bought out by the Americans and need never work again.'

What proportion of these ample profits feeds back into the chronically cash-starved British film industry? Not a lot, Abbott concedes. 'Basically, our industry is dealing with American product, and by the nature of things, most video revenue goes back to the United States, and is ploughed into production there. At the moment, with so few titles being produced in this country, the British film industry is a drop in the ocean. If for any disastrous reason all film production came to an end in Britain, there would not be a gap—in terms of video revenues, it would not even be noticed. The public seems perfectly happy to buy or rent the material that comes from America. It is to be deplored, but that's the situation.'

Not much chance, then of hopeful British film-makers finding backing for their projects from the video industry. Few UK distributors would have the authority to consider any such deal; the decisions are made in America by the parent company, on a worldwide pan-media basis. Still, a degree of financial feedback does occur. *The Evil Dead*, a smash hit on tape (thanks largely to some backhanded press publicity), was distributed here by Palace, and thus helped subsidise the making of *Company of Wolves*. (Palace, like Virgin, came into film production through video, reversing the traditional route.) And if a British producer can strike a lucrative deal on video rights, it all goes towards funding his or her next film. Assuming the market continues to expand, those rights could become a major—maybe even *the* major—source of finance to British film-makers.

So, will the market go on expanding? On the face of it, there seems no good reason why not. Piracy, the rampant problem of the early 80s, has been effectively contained by tougher legislation; most of the chief villains have moved off into less strenuous occupations like drug-dealing. Five years ago, when bootleg material accounted for two-thirds of the UK market, the big US companies seriously contemplated pulling out altogether and abandoning Britain to the pirates. Now, Abbott reckons, pirate taping is 'mostly in the hands of smalltime amateurs on housing estates, and accounts for no more than 20 per cent of the market. We will probably never get it much below 15 per cent. There is an irreducible minimum that it's just uneconomic to track down—not to mention the bad public relations you get from busting unemployed housewives and so on.'

In theory, the ownership of video recorders must reach saturation point, thus halting further consumer expansion in that direction. Even then, though, there would be plenty of slack to take up, given that only 25 per cent of VCR owners regularly rent pre-recorded tapes. The rest presumably either buy them, or—the great majority—record programmes off-air. But while rental income continues to rise it represents a decreasing percentage of the market as a whole; the growth area is outright purchase of video films. From a small base, 'sell-through' (industry jargon for pre-recorded tapes sold to retail outlets for one-off purchase) is taking off fast: £50m-worth of sales in 1986, probably twice as much in 1987.

It is a phenomenon regarded by the video industry with mixed feelings. Profit margins on sales are tiny compared with those on rental; a tape that sells in Woolworths for £6.99 earns no more than a few pence for the distributor. The rich pickings are in rental, and many dealers—both wholesale and retail—resent the sell-through trade and would be happy to see it collapse. On the other hand, there is little evidence that one market is taking custom from the other; the two remain remarkably separate, each with its own distributors, its own outlets—even its own product, since rental films tend to be the recent releases and bought tapes offer vintage material, five years old or more. Even the customers, it seems, are different; renters, on the whole, do not buy, and buyers do not rent. Unless rental begins to decline in absolute terms, the two markets should be able to coexist.

There is, though, one potential threat to the whole industry looming on the horizon, the more ominous in that its precise outlines remain as yet indistinct: the forthcoming Broadcasting Standards Bill. An ingenuous observer might expect the video industry to enjoy wholehearted government approval; with its entrepreneurial structure, its forthright appeal to free customer choice, its self-made working-class millionaires basking on their yachts, it should surely present a shining model of the Thatcherite dream. But if anything or anybody is going to clobber video sales in the immediate future, it looks like being the current Tory administration.

When 'video nasties' began edging into the headlines a few years back, the BVA and the BBFC—with the blessing of the then Home Secretary, William Whitelaw—set up a joint working party to formulate a self-regulatory code. On the point of completion, their efforts were pre-empted by the Video Recordings Act, announced in the Tories' 1983 election manifesto, and rushed through—'as a matter of the highest priority'—in the first session of the new parliament.

'It then took them until September 1985,' Norman Abbott recalls, 'before it was finally put into operation. Why there was not a parliamentary uproar, I shall never know. And since then the police have instituted precisely two prosecutions—an average of one a year. There are flagrant breaches of the Act up and down the country; one dealer on the South Coast has become so exasperated, he has applied for a High Court writ to compel the Chief Constable to carry out his statutory duty. It is ludicrous; after all the fuss, all the talk about an "emotional time-bomb", they pass this measure—and no one will enforce it.'

Meanwhile, in the wake of the Hungerford and Bristol shootings (described by the news media on minimal evidence as 'video killings'), both the Prime Minister and the Home Office have announced that the Video Recordings Act 'is not working', and must be replaced by 'stronger measures'. Just what these might entail, besides bringing video within the jurisdiction of the new Broadcasting Standards Council, remains unclear. Various ideas are being mooted; one proposal is for video outlets to be licensed, like pubs or betting shops. 'There is even talk,' Abbott observes despondently, 'that "15" and "18" videos should be banned completely, and adult material could only be seen in the cinema.'

It's an ill wind. For years now, the appeals for state support for British cinema have been met with bland indifference. It would be ironic, should the Government at last intervene to boost box-office takings—by the crude expedient of gelding the video industry. ■

FROM HERE

The man who had bought James Jones' 800-page novel *From Here to Eternity* was the president of Columbia Pictures, Harry Cohn. It was the typical gesture of a gambler, an extremely aggressive man whom I got to know—and almost like—later on. The project was immediately known throughout Hollywood as 'Cohn's Folly'. He had paid a lot of money for the film rights but no one believed he would ever be able to make it. Published during the McCarthy era, the book had created a sensation; now, it languished for many months until a young writer, Dan Taradash, found an original approach and wrote an exciting first-draft screenplay.

Like many of the industry fathers, Cohn was a robber baron, predatory and cunning. Many people disliked him with a passion: some thought he was a crook. Be that as it may, he had no feelings of guilt. Where Louis B. Mayer was sanctimonious in manipulating people, Cohn never left one in doubt about where he stood. He was straight in a crooked sort of way, and unbelievably rude. Meeting my wife for the first time, while I was away shooting, he opened the conversation by saying 'Your husband is a louse.' I took this as a mark of grudging respect. Bull-like in attack, he even had a sense of humour as long as money was not involved. In short, his was an endearing and stimulating personality.

Unlike some studio chiefs of today who need a computer and twelve executives to reach an indecision, Cohn was a one-man band in every sense of the word. In the very early days, before I signed the contract, I disliked him to a point where I asked my agent, the legendary Abe Lastfogel, to get me off the picture. He said 'of course' to me and immediately went back to Cohn saying 'Zinnemann is dying to make this movie', and the more I struggled to get out, the deeper I found myself getting in. Of course I found out about this much later. Abe was not out to make a quick buck from commissions at the expense of his clients' careers. Combining shrewdness with wisdom and a great sense of humour, he had a clear, intuitive vision of their talent and their future prospects.

Montgomery Clift: 'He certainly knew nothing of close-order drill.'

It is necessary to see the making of *From Here to Eternity* in the overall context of the time when it was shot. The year was 1953, long before the Vietnam War, Watergate and the era of disillusion. There was automatic respect for Federal Authority. To voice doubts about any of its symbols—the Army, Navy or FBI—was to lay oneself open to deep suspicion. McCarthyism was still very much alive, and filming a book so openly critical of the peacetime Army—it was set in the months leading up to Pearl Harbor—was regarded by many as foolhardy if not downright subversive. Two studios had already shelved the project before Cohn bought it and he did so without even enquiring about the prospect of military assistance.

This seemed hopeless. In the circumstances I, as the director, became the focal point of very strong pressures coming from all sorts of directions. Jones' story dealt in depth with comradeship but it also criticised with great irony many negative aspects of army life: officers abusing their rank, the brutality of soldiers towards each other and the violent treatment of men serving a sentence in the army prison, the Stockade. There was also infidelity—an officer's wife having an affair with a sergeant—which would almost certainly not be passed by the Breen Office (where censorship was exercised on behalf of the production code) and even less by the Army.

This chapter from a forthcoming autobiography by Fred Zinnemann is based on interview material by Alexander Walker.

FRED ZINNEMANN

TO ETERNITY

The Pentagon's position was that no film based on this novel could possibly benefit the Army, therefore any assistance would be denied. But to proceed in those early days without the Army's help on technical advice, locations and equipment would have resulted in sheer caricature, with slouching civilian extras pretending to be professional soldiers. I was not part of the project then, but I would never have made the film without the Army's OK.

Fortunately the producer, Buddy Adler, known as the 'Silver Fox' and an ex-officer himself, was able to win the military's cautious approval; they agreed to co-operate if two important changes were made in the script, which was then too long by about thirty minutes. (Cohn had decreed that the picture must not run even one minute longer than two hours.) The first change presented no problem and was in effect an improvement. Taradash and I hated the second change, which led to the worst scene in the film; more about this later. On discussing our options, all four of us—Taradash, Adler, Cohn and I—decided to go along with the Army's proposal. We knew that great tact and wariness would be needed throughout the filming.

Taradash had suggested me as director. He had seen *Teresa* and had liked the way the soldiers were presented. The military aspects of *The Search* and *The Men* were also a plus. Those two men, Adler and Taradash, persuaded Cohn to consider me for this plum assignment. I was still known as an 'art-house' director or a 'directors' director'—meaning good reviews but no box office—so this was obviously an enormous favour. Cohn agreed with some misgivings—he had hated *A Member of the Wedding*—but he sent me the script. I was to see him the next day.

He and I clashed almost as soon as we met and I was given a vivid demonstration of how his manner could veer from the avuncular to the tyrannical in a split second. He came straight to the point: 'How do you like the script?'—'It's very good.'—'Do you want to direct it?'—'Yes.'—'XYZ is going to play the lead.' (He mentioned an excellent young leading man.)—I asked 'Why?'—Cohn looked startled: 'Why? Because he's under contract here,' he said gruffly. 'He hasn't worked for ten weeks, his salary's mounting up. He looks like a boxer, the girls like him. What else do you want to know?'—'Well, I don't think XYZ is right,' I said. A pause. 'Who do *you* want?'—'Montgomery Clift.'

That was when Cohn became very angry indeed. The sense of his tirade was that this was an idiotic suggestion. Clift was wrong for the part of Prewitt, the young private who refuses to box for his company and has his life made hell by his glory-hunting captain. He was no soldier and no boxer and probably a homosexual, said Cohn.

The first paragraph in Jones' book described Prewitt as a 'deceptively slim young man'. It was just that quality, the 'deceptive slimness', needed to give an edge to Prewitt's character. I wanted Clift because this story was not about a fellow who didn't want to box: it was a story about the human spirit refusing to be broken, about a man who resists all sorts of pressure from an institution he loves, who becomes an outsider, and eventually dies for it. It was quite clear to me, if difficult to explain, what Clift would make of that character.

Finally Cohn said: 'I'm the president of Columbia. You can't give me ultimatums,' and I told him that I couldn't do justice to the script unless I felt confident that I had the right cast, and perhaps he should get another director. Thanking him for his interest, I left him screaming (it was Cohn who was screaming); but he did send the script to Clift the next day.

An actor photographs Deborah Kerr; right, Burt Lancaster.

So, we started our working relationship on the basis of mutual hatred, mixed with mutual respect. Cohn wasn't quite sure what to make of me; and in turn, I grew to appreciate his sense of showmanship and his predicament: he ran his company like a medieval fiefdom, by sheer terror; he had spies on every set and he knew everything that was going on in the studio—who was sending whom flowers, who was sleeping with whom; he knew it all and people 'yessed' him day in and day out. ('Why don't you let me finish before you say yes?' as C. B. DeMille once said.) Yet in rare moments of repose his eyes were sad; he seemed a man in search of people who would say 'No' to him and mean it.

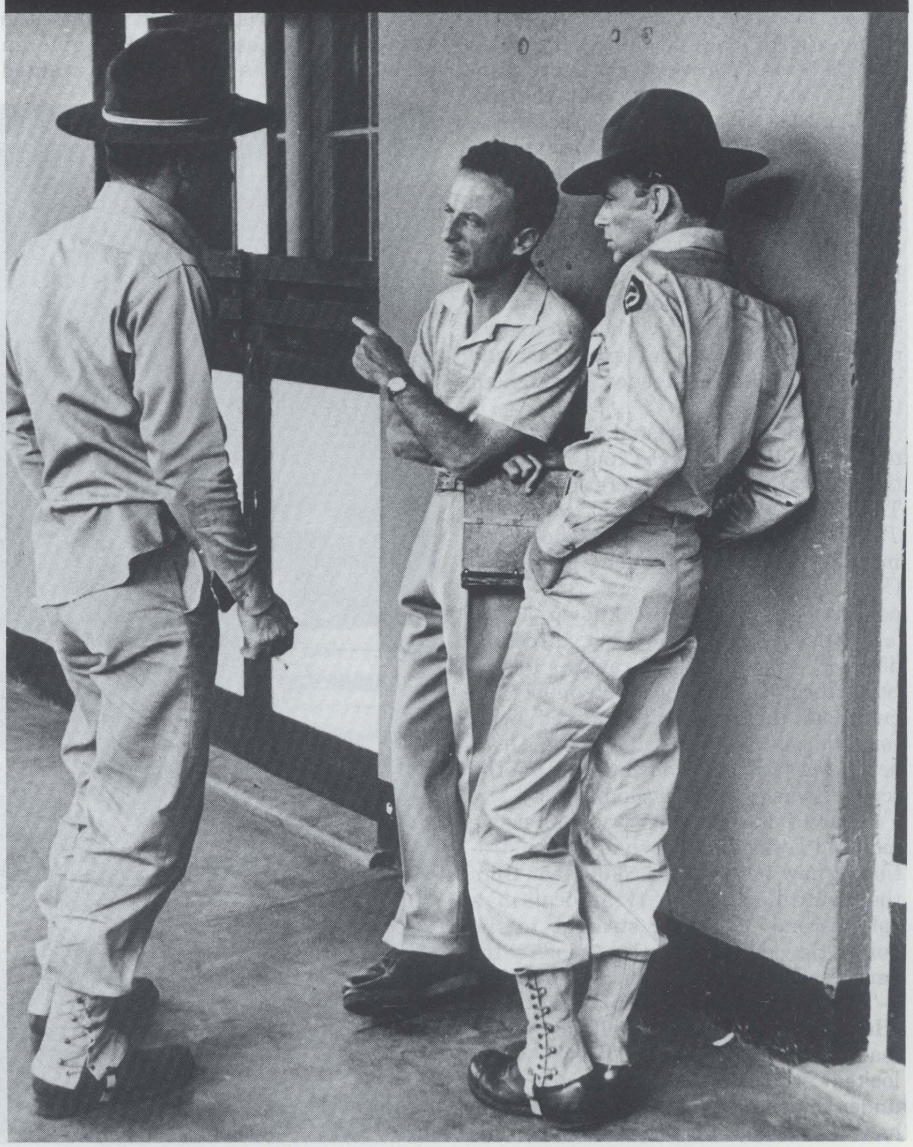
Clift rose brilliantly to the occasion. He didn't know how to box, much less how to play the bugle, and he certainly knew nothing about close-order drill; there were long sessions with one of the great bugle players, Manny Kline, and endless hours of bayonet practice at Schofield Barracks in Honolulu, where much of the picture was shot; by the time Monty was ready for the cameras one could have sworn that he had bugled all his life and that he was a top soldier and a good boxer. In the very first shot behind the credit titles he was introduced as a loner, going his own way—a tiny figure approaching the camera and growing larger and larger, seen through an infantry platoon moving across the screen in the foreground.

For many months after the end of filming Monty continued to be possessed by his own creation—Private Prewitt. He was quite unable to get out of that character. By his intensity he forced the other actors to come up to his standard of performance. But casting *From Here to Eternity* was not only a question of getting the right person for the right part, but the chemistry between the actors, how they would work together.

Most people had thought of Joan Crawford for the part of Karen—the captain's adulterous wife. She seemed adequate, but I had nagging doubts, knowing that she was about to start discussing her wardrobe. Then suddenly the agent Bert Allenberg—a man with the rare talent of reading letters upside down—phoned. He sounded diffident. 'What about Deborah Kerr?' he asked. Dan, Buddy and I thought it a brilliant idea, to cast against type: up to that point Miss Kerr had played ladies who had what Hollywood calls 'Class', and rather chilly class at that. (When posing in a swimsuit for wardrobe stills, she was heard to say 'I feel naked without my tiara.') I thought that, hearing a corporal say at the start of the film that 'she sleeps with every soldier on the post', the audience would not believe it. They would be curious to see how things

Columbia's Harry Cohn, ex-soldier.

Fred Zinnemann, centre, and Frank Sinatra, right.



Until now 'Miss Kerr had played ladies who had what Hollywood calls "Class".'

would develop, so the casting of Deborah would create an added sense of suspense and excitement. If a sexy actress were to play that part the outcome would be a foregone conclusion. Cohn could see the showmanship in it: he didn't need persuading. Nor, as it happened, did Deborah. Her performance opened a whole new range of roles for her.

Burt Lancaster seemed to be the best choice for the part of the Master Sergeant. This *was* type casting. Not only did he have the right authority and weight, but more importantly there was a chemistry between him and Deborah, and the combination worked out well, especially in the beach scene which we shot near Diamond Head, close to Honolulu, in the course of our three weeks location there. The challenge was timing the scene to the incoming waves, so that they would break over the couple at the right instant. Typically but unsuccessfully, Cohn had demanded shooting to start immediately upon arrival after the night flight from Los Angeles.

That scene, regarded as sensational and extremely provocative a mere thirty-five years ago, seems harmless and friendly by today's standards. Although it was shot very much as written, the movie censors who knew the script by heart nevertheless insisted on deleting four seconds of it. In later years I found that even more had been snipped out by theatre projectionists, as a souvenir no doubt. For many years the tourist buses used to stop routinely at this point of the Hawaiian shoreline to let people admire 'the spot where Burt and Deborah made love in the waves'. It is a curious contribution we have made to popular culture. I am much more proud of the boom shot near the end of *High Noon*, as Gary Cooper starts his long walk to destiny down the main street.

Two important roles were still open: Lorene, the smalltown girl from Iowa who works in a Hawaiian brothel. Because of censorship, the brothel had been converted into a 'club' in Dan Taradash's script and the girl into a 'hostess'. Lorene, born poor, on the wrong side of the railroad tracks, has only one ambition: to make enough money to return to her hometown and be 'proper and respectable'; a bourgeois ideal, used with brilliant irony by the author. Donna Reed was not my first choice, but one could not forever say 'No' to Cohn. Lorene was called 'the princess' by the other girls and Donna fitted that description. Besides, she was under contract to Columbia. She got the part, and played it so touchingly and so well that an Oscar was her reward.

Last but not least was the part of Maggio, Prewitt's friend, the army rebel who gets slung into the Stockade where brutal punishment breaks his body if not his spirit, and causes his death in Prewitt's arms. I had wanted Eli Wallach, who had made an excellent test, but I understood that Elia Kazan needed him to fulfil his promise to be in *Camino Real* on Broadway. The other story I heard was that Eli Wallach's agent wanted too much money. The man who was determined to get the part redoubled his efforts—it was none other than Frank Sinatra, who had read the script and bombarded all of us, Cohn, Adler and myself, with pleading cables all signed 'Maggio'. At this time his career was in the doldrums, but in spite of one or two unsuccessful pictures he seemed a possibility.

Sinatra was in Africa where Ava Gardner was filming *Mogambo*, when Cohn, always careful with money, cabled him that a test could be made if he would pay his own way back to Hollywood. In a flash, Sinatra had returned and the test turned out well—it was Sinatra in uniform. Cohn paid him a bare $8,000 for his part, but this was a turning point for Sinatra; he received an Oscar, and from then on his career took off like a rocket. At no time were horses' heads involved in the casting decision. The author of *The Godfather* was using poetic licence.

Sinatra was at his best in the first or second take of a scene: in later takes he was apt to lose spontaneity, whereas Clift would use each take as a rehearsal to add more detail so that the scenes gained in depth as we went on. It was an interesting problem when they did a scene together: how to get the best performance from them both in the same take. It reminded me of the situation in one of my earliest films, *Eyes in the Night*, where the blind detective needed eight takes before he could remember his lines and his shy seeing-eye dog would run away and hide after the first take.

We had excellent co-operation from the Army in Hawaii: Our technical adviser Bill Mullen, a very tough military police sergeant, was very good on drill and proper military bearing. The commanding general John O'Daniel,

known affectionately as 'Iron Ass Mike', by strange irony looked not unlike Harry Cohn. Cohn himself left us alone; he was in residence at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel but kept getting minute-by-minute reports from his various spies.

One of the last location scenes to be shot in Hawaii was a night exterior—Maggio's arrest by the military police. Maggio, blind drunk along with Prewitt in a Honolulu park, feels harassed beyond endurance; his rage boils over, he *jumps up*, berating the policemen who are twice his size and attacks them. The afternoon's rehearsal was excellent but Cohn had heard about it and thought that we would be in trouble with the Army—Sinatra was just too provocative. He wanted us to tone things down; the actors and I disagreed, although I felt that the objection had come from someone above Cohn.

For a few mad hours I believed that I could get away with shooting the scene as rehearsed and putting Cohn before an accomplished fact. Night fell; lights and camera were ready. Cohn was not present, but his informers were. At the last moment he roared up to the set, together with the garrison's top echelon of officers. They had come ostensibly to watch us at work but it soon became clear that a confrontation could develop and lead to closing down the picture. We were, after all, on army territory. I knew that we could be jeopardising the whole film; it was a situation I could not win. To quit was out of the question as far as I was concerned.

Sinatra delivered his speech while *seated*. I can't blame him for being upset; but I wonder whether he ever understood what was at stake.

The first Army-imposed script change was actually an improvement: nothing should be shown of the brutal treatment meted out to Maggio inside the Stockade, at the mercy of the sadistic sergeant (Ernest Borgnine). Sinatra's death scene in Prewitt's arms tells it all. At the very end when his body is put into the jeep, Clift said, 'See that his head don't bump.' That line was cut. Cohn was adamant that the film should not run a minute longer than two hours; he did not understand the heartbreak the line contained and contractually it was he who had the final cut. I had no recourse.

The second script change eliminated a splendid sarcastic touch which ends the novel: the promotion of the villainous captain to the rank of major. The Army would have none of that. It was one of the two basic conditions for their co-operation that the captain should be found out and given the choice of resigning from the Army or facing a court-martial. It led to the worst moment in the film, resembling a recruiting short. It makes me sick every time I see it. Today most of the sarcastic comments of the novel could be filmed without much trouble; to have tried using them in 1953 would have meant giving up the film altogether.

Montgomery Clift: possessed by Private Prewitt.

The Japanese attack Pearl Harbor.

In retrospect, I am surprised to think how many battles I did win during the making of the film. One of them had to do with colour: the sales department ('the boys in New York') made it plain that the film would gross an extra million dollars if it was shot in colour, but I was able to persuade Cohn to agree to shooting it in black and white. This made a great difference to the picture's impact; colour would have made it look trivial.

Thanks to the enormous help from Buddy Adler and to the excellent production crew the picture was shot in forty-one days, including the Hawaiian location. We started filming in early March and finished in May. Three months later, in August, the picture was in the theatres.

The first preview had happened much earlier and was conducted in an unorthodox way. Cohn had decided to use a new electronic system of recording audience reactions. About two hundred people were literally wired to their seats in a large projection room. There were small levers each could push—to the right if they liked the scene, to the

Montgomery Clift and Ernest Borgnine.

On set: Fred Zinnemann, Donna Reed, Montgomery Clift, Frank Sinatra.

left if they didn't. At first this seemed a ridiculous enterprise, especially discouraging because there was absolutely no reaction from the audience. They sat there like wax figures at Madame Tussaud's, busy concentrating on those levers. At the end of it I was convinced we had a disaster on our hands.

Then Harry Cohn came tearing in, carrying a roll of paper twenty-five feet long, with the combined graph of those two hundred people plotted on it, and he said excitedly that the curve indicated Columbia was going to have its biggest-ever hit. The curve, he said, showed not only what people had enjoyed but *how much* they had enjoyed it, and it also showed the slow spots. It was eerie to see human reactions reduced to this twenty-five foot roll of paper. But even worse, it worked—and was used for quite some time afterwards.

There was no time and no need to make changes after that preview but we all thought Cohn had gone mad when he decreed that 'this picture will open in the Capitol Theatre in New York in August.' There was no air-conditioning then, and in August New York was a sweat-box. No one had ever heard of releasing a major film in midsummer. We were convinced that his gambler's instinct was leading to certain suicide. More was to come: Cohn declared that there would be no publicity, except for one full-page ad in the *Times* which *he* would sign as president of Columbia, urging people to see it.

I was in Los Angeles when the picture opened on Broadway on a sweltering August night. No premiere, no limousines, nothing. At nine p.m. Marlene Dietrich (whom I hardly knew) called from New York and said that it was midnight there, but the Capitol Theatre was bulging, people were still standing around the block and there was an extra performance just starting. I said, 'How is that possible? There has been no publicity.' 'They smell it,' she said.

That year there was stiff competition for Oscars. It was truly a vintage year. Willie Wyler had *Roman Holiday*, Billy Wilder had *Stalag 17*, George Stevens had *Shane*. I was encouraged to see that we had 13 nominations, including an incredible one for *costumes*, which consisted largely of uniforms and a bikini for Deborah; judging by this straw-in-the-wind it seemed to me that we were in for a wave of popular approval. We did in fact get eight Oscars on that occasion, not including Deborah and Monty, to my great regret.

Cohn had an incredible knack for saving the extra penny. Dan Taradash and I were working with him on the dialogue one evening: it was eight p.m., I had laryngitis and wanted to go home. 'No, no,' Cohn said. 'We've got to finish this tonight. I'll take you to dinner at Perrinos [the poshest restaurant in Los Angeles at that time] and then we'll come back here.' I said I had no necktie. Cohn snorted, pressed a button and a poor man from the wardrobe department appeared, trembling. He had never been in the Presence before and couldn't imagine what crime he might have committed to be summoned at this time of night. 'Bring three ties,' Cohn growled. The man returned with three cheesy ones, worth about 75 cents each, and I picked one. We returned after a good dinner and worked away until midnight. As I was walking out the door Cohn said, 'Hey, wait a minute, give me back that tie!' I found it endearing that a man spending $1.9 million on a movie should be able to keep his eye on a 75-cent tie.

As to Cohn's showmanship: he paid very little attention to thirty of the thirty-two pictures the studio turned out each year, but took enormous pride in one or two special pictures such as *From Here to Eternity*. His taste was quite often awful, but he had huge experience and a gut-instinct about audiences and he constantly got into our hair checking every line of dialogue, worrying about casting, wardrobe and locations. I wish there were a few studio heads like him today. ■

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MAJOR

RICHARD

Hollywood's major film studios may be beginning to regain a position of strength which they have not held since the days of the moguls—Adolph Zukor, Louis B. Mayer, Harry Cohn, Jack Warner and the rest. And this time they are doing it with the tacit aid of a compliant US Justice Department. The new Hollywood powers that be are not imitating their legendary predecessors in style; mostly they are corporate types who run the West Coast studios from Manhattan highrises. But they are starting to assert a power which leads their critics to forecast a familiar pattern of price fixing, restraint of trade and a move towards further control of the domestic film industry.

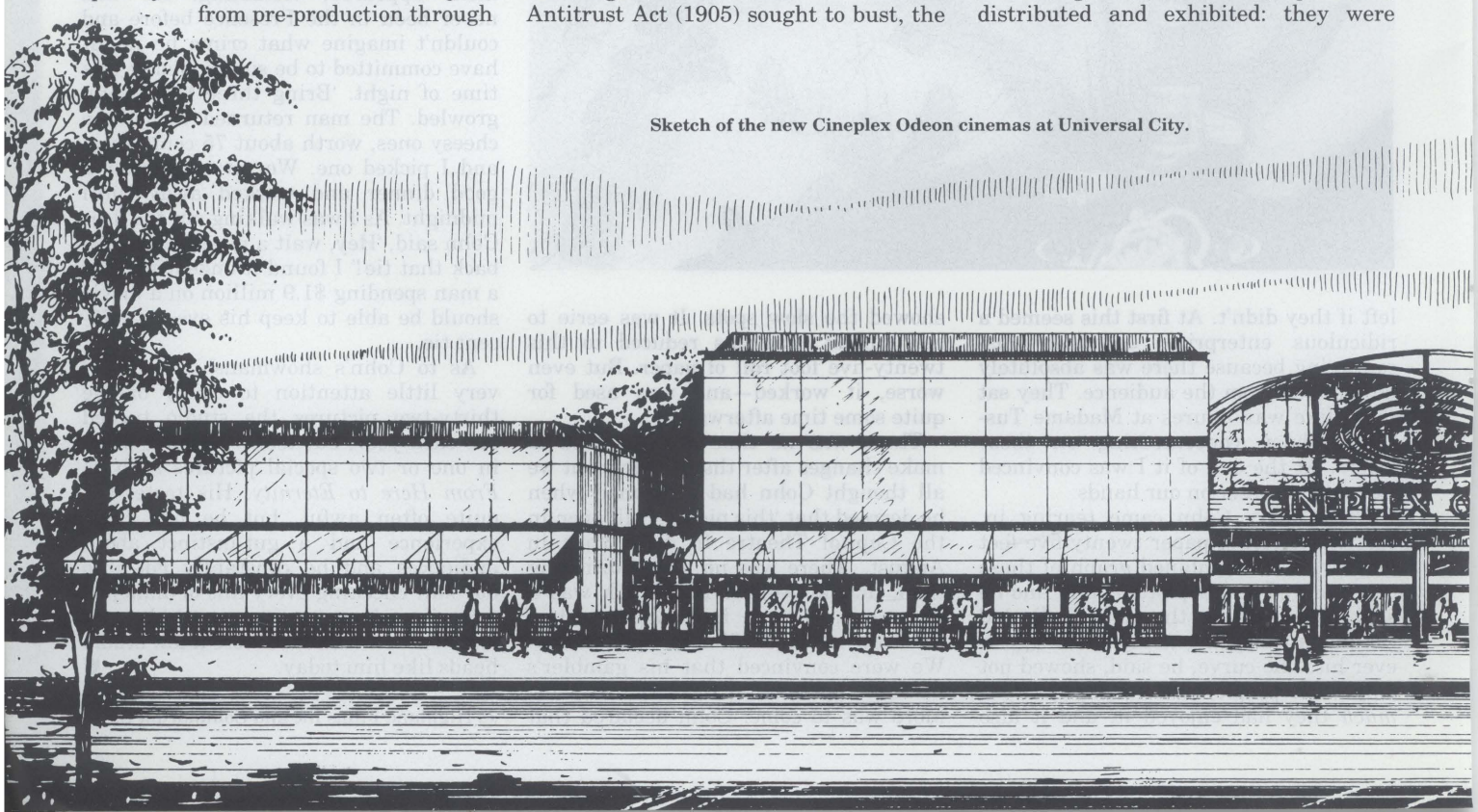
Over the last two years, the majors have been gobbling up retail theatre chains, spending more than a billion dollars, acquiring nearly a fifth of the movie houses in North America, and creating what many see as the beginning of an impenetrable vertical and horizontal monopoly. One independent producer who asked to remain nameless called the studio acquisitions 'a feeding frenzy that has got everybody [other independents] in this town scared to death.' What this frenzy might lead to, with more and more control resting squarely in the hands of the majors, from pre-production through post-production and now all the way to exhibition, is a system that, like its predecessors, could squeeze independent film-makers, distributors and exhibitors all but out of the picture.

Most of the studios contacted would not return calls to comment on their acquisitions strategy. 'Whatever I say will be the wrong answer,' said Joel Resnick, chief of distribution for Orion Films. But the rationale behind the takeovers was expressed by Michael Garstin. Now an associate with Bear, Stearns & Co, he served as chief financial officer at Orion from 1980-85. 'I guess the idea behind it is to get vertically integrated,' Garstin said. 'Whether it works or not is another question.'

Originally based in New Jersey and New York, the film business moved west in 1910. Soon afterwards, the chase for domination of the fledgling industry was on in earnest. Acting as Greek chorus for the developing drama were the courts, which brought up the rear and commented periodically on the action.

The chorus' first major aria was sung in 1915. Although the majors were not yet in existence, their ancestors, simply called 'The Trust', were. Like other such organisations which the Sherman Antitrust Act (1905) sought to bust, the motion picture trust had acquired unprecedented power over its industry. Using high-powered patent attorneys, strong-arm persuasion tactics, sweetheart deals and exclusive contracts, The Trust wiped the slate clean of all significant competitors. Operating by way of the Motion Picture Patent Company and the General Film Company (the former controlled the patents; the latter access to the films), The Trust soon had near total control over the new industry's technology, raw materials (a sweetheart deal with Eastman-Kodak) and distribution. But in 1915, in an action brought in a Pennsylvania US District Court, The Trust was effectively dismembered. The court found it guilty of 'dominat[ing] and control[ling] the entire motion picture business . . . and conspir[ing] to monopolise trade in the motion picture industry.'

From the ashes of The Trust the phoenix of Hollywood's Big Eight ('the majors') would arise. In no particular order of importance, the Big Eight were RKO, Universal, Columbia, Warner Brothers, Loews, United Artists, Twentieth Century-Fox and Paramount Pictures. Some were producer/distributors (Columbia and Universal); United Artists was only a distributor. The remaining five, however, produced, distributed and exhibited: they were



Sketch of the new Cineplex Odeon cinemas at Universal City.

POWERS

TRAINOR

vertically integrated companies. From these studios, during the majors' thirty-year zenith, were born the legends—and the clichés—of California's most glittering industry. The studios kept control of the medium in all its phases—from writers, directors, producers, stars and technicians held under ironclad, long-term contracts, to sole ownership of the finished products and exclusive authority over their distribution and exhibition. The independents didn't rock the boat; they operated in concert with the majors. Those who tried to buck the system were likely to hear a familiar refrain: 'You'll never work in this town again.'

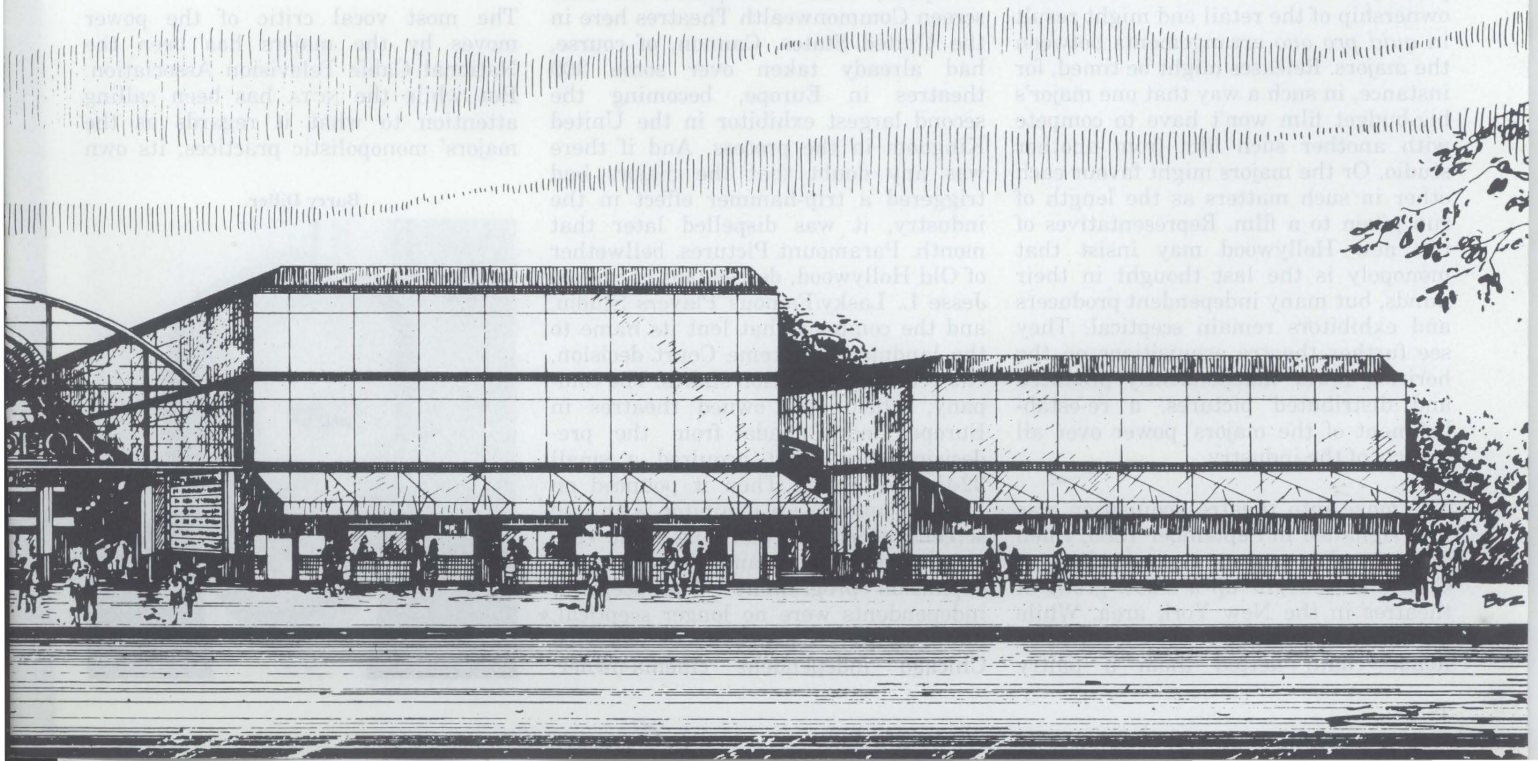
Again the courts were forced to intervene. In two decisions handed down in 1930, which criticised the monopolistic practices of the majors and again cited the Sherman Antitrust Act, the courts ordered the Big Eight to desist from unfair business practices in their dealings with independent exhibitors and producers. Ten years later, the courts were back in action, antitrust crowbar in hand, still trying to break the majors' grip. Their first actions in 1940 resulted in the studios entering into consent decrees to refrain from unfair trading practices. These were quickly violated. A study of the film industry commissioned by the federal government found that the 'struggle for dominance goes forward ruthlessly, with oft-times little regard for . . . the industry's social responsibilities.'

Faced with a track record of such steadfast non-compliance, the US Supreme Court moved to centre stage and took on the majors in a pitched battle which would attempt to settle once and for all the issues of unfair trade practices, vertical integration and horizontal monopolisation. The upshot of this was the landmark Paramount Decision of 1948. In a bill of indictment by now as familiar as a B-movie script, the court found that the studios had abused the use of copyright licences, had engaged in price-fixing schemes (horizontally by way of agreements between themselves; vertically between the majors and their licensed exhibitors), and that a number of other business practices (joint ventures between studios to operate theatres; 'block booking' of films) constituted significant restraint of trade.

When the Paramount Decision was handed down in 1948, the studios were forced to divest themselves either of their production facilities or of their exhibition divisions: you could have one or the other, the court said, but not both. This decision accelerated the end of Hollywood's Golden Age. Production at the majors fell away from its peak of a picture a week to an average of two a month. Technicians found themselves out of work. Long-term contracts were now reserved for the sure-fire box-office winners or the up and coming. The symbol of excess gone to decay was visible for all to see when passing Twentieth Century's backlot, where Griffith's spectacular Babylon set from his failed epic *Intolerance* stood rotting in the weeds. The majors' time in the sun was over. Observers speculated that they were defunct, finished. Their legendary chiefs died too. Seeing the crowds at Harry Cohn's funeral, some wag noted: 'It proves what they always say. Give the public what they want to see and they'll come out for it.'

The new era was that of the independent producer. Some, like Samuel Goldwyn, worked under the auspices of a major studio. Others, like Sam Spiegel, Joseph Levine and Stanley Kramer, worked on a picture by picture basis, offering their films to the highest bidding distributor. Still others, like Republic Pictures in the 50s and Roger Corman's New World Pictures in the 60s and 70s, were producer/distributors. The postwar importation of films from Europe further increased the independents' share of the market.

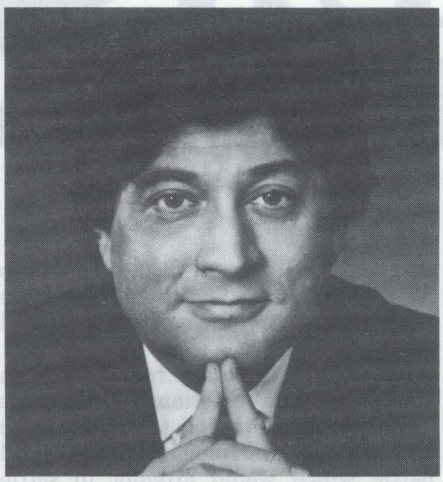
In the years between 1948 and 1985,



which brought the first rumblings of the majors' run on retail theatre chains, the percentage of North American film rentals reaped by the Hollywood majors declined considerably. In 1971, the high point for the independents, the figure had dipped to a point where the majors had a *mere* 69 per cent of the market. But with the coming of the mega-blockbuster film (*The Godfather* in 1972 marks the onset of the period; a mega-blockbuster is a film that grosses in excess of $100m), the major studios began steadily increasing their percentage take, eventually climbing to the mid-90 per cent range by 1982. With the apparent willingness of the anti-trust division of the Justice Department to let bygones be bygones with regard to the either/or, distribution/exhibition aspect of the Paramount decree, the majors began looking at acquisition of the industry's retail end as the logical next step towards further increases in revenue.

In the context of the mega-blockbuster film—from Universal's *Jaws* to Warners' *Full Metal Jacket*—the retail takeovers make compelling sense. If the studio that paid $30-40m for one of these pictures can guarantee the film a fifteen-week run in half the 1,400 theatres it owns (such films usually open in between 1,000-1,800 screens), it stands to recoup a significant part of that investment at considerably less risk than if it entered into open-bid contracts with independent theatre outlets. And in looking at that most venerated of all Hollywood institutions, the be all, end all 'bottom line', the majors will also receive a larger percentage of the retail dollar the public spends if they eliminate the middle men—the independent theatre-owners. The independents are also afraid that studio ownership of the retail end might result in *quid pro quo* arrangements between the majors. Releases might be timed, for instance, in such a way that one major's big-budget film won't have to compete with another such film from another studio. Or the majors might favour each other in such matters as the length of run given to a film. Representatives of the new Hollywood may insist that monopoly is the last thought in their minds, but many independent producers and exhibitors remain sceptical. They see further theatre acquisitions on the horizon, fewer independently produced and distributed pictures, a re-establishment of the majors' power over all aspects of the industry.

The move into theatre acquisition was first signalled in September 1985, when Columbia Pictures (now a subsidiary of Coca-Cola) bought up a small group of theatres in the New York area. While Columbia's purchase of the Walter Reade chain netted them a paltry twelve screens, it was not long before other major studios followed suit, and within six months or so the rush was on. In May 1986, MCA, whose subsidiary is Universal Studios, bought 50 per cent of Cineplex Odeon, a Canadian exhibition chain. Cineplex, under the leadership of Toronto businessman Garth Drabinsky, has been one of the innovators in the 'mall cinema' development, the practice of installing multiple screens in one location, usually a shopping mall. Overnight, MCA-Universal was again a major exhibitor, having acquired 1,176 screens of a vigorously expanding company. (Cineplex Odeon would subsequently announce that it was planning to enter US film distribution; in other words, it too would become a studio releasing and exhibiting films: the same kind of vertically integrated entity that the US Supreme Court once sought to discourage.)



Garth Drabinsky. Photo: Karsh.

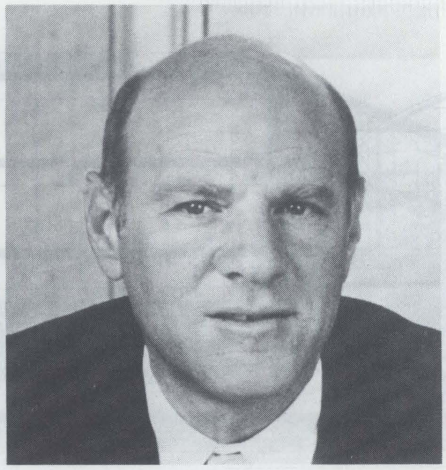
In July 1986, the Cannon Film Group announced that it too was joining the stampede, when it acquired the 425-screen Commonwealth Theatres here in the United States. Cannon, of course, had already taken over some 300 theatres in Europe, becoming the second largest exhibitor in the United Kingdom in the process. And if there was any doubt that the majors had triggered a trip-hammer effect in the industry, it was dispelled later that month. Paramount Pictures, bellwether of Old Hollywood, descendant of the old Jesse L. Lasky/Famous Players Studio, and the company that lent its name to the landmark Supreme Court decision, entered the acquisition stakes. The company, which still owned theatres in Europe and Canada from the pre-decision days, first acquired a small 32-theatre chain. Then it pounced on Mann Theatres, an exhibitor with 350 screens which was planning what *Variety* described as an 'ambitious two-year expansion programme'. The sceptical independents were no longer sceptical; now they were downright nervous. One Chicago independent cinema-owner, commenting on Cineplex Odeon's purchase of a local movie house, moaned that Universal's partner 'wants to knock out every independent theatre-operator in the Chicago market.'

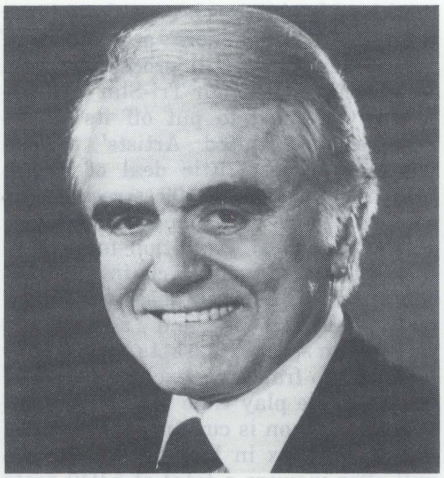
Tempers flared when Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and chief lobbyist for the majors, attempted to deliver a speech to an assembly of independent theatre-owners. The independents harangued Valenti on the practice of limited print buys available to independents. (Prints go first to the major-owned chains; the independents argue that in effect this practice prevents them from profiting from the mega-blockbusters until the films are far past the point of mass appeal.)

Independent producers and film-makers also have cause for complaint. 'Ten years ago,' said one producer, 'if you had a good property you could get backing, equipment rental, lab time and distribution, if you had any track record to speak of. What is happening now, you're lucky if you can even get them [the majors] to take a meeting.' A study undertaken by *Variety* found that a startling 53 per cent of independently produced films had failed to reach domestic audiences. 'A stranglehold on the market,' said *Variety*, 'which compares most unfavourably with the indies accounting for as much as a 20-25 per cent market share as recently as fifteen years ago.' As more recent figures (to 31 May 1987) show, things are only getting worse for the independents: their share is now a paltry 2.3 per cent of the North American market. The top five studios (Warners, Universal, Twentieth Century Fox, Columbia and Paramount) controlled upwards of 65 per cent.

The most vocal critic of the power moves by the majors has been the National Cable Television Association. But while the NCTA has been calling attention to what it regards as the majors' monopolistic practices, its own

Barry Diller.





Jack Valenti.

motives are not entirely altruistic or public-spirited. Its members see their interests as threatened by the muscled-up majors. As Barry Diller, former Paramount chief, now at Fox, and regarded by many as Hollywood's brightest executive, said in a *New Yorker* article: 'Now they [the studios] are absolutely driven and committed to seeing that all [the] further possibilities offered by the new technologies are not going to be exploited without their being able to exercise their historical leverage.'

As well as buying up theatre chains, the majors have been exercising their leverage by acquiring television stations and cable channels and, in the case of Twentieth Century Fox, seeking to establish what amounts to a fourth network. Though not yet in the same league with ABC, CBS and NBC, stations owned by Fox currently reach 24.1 per cent of all American households. Universal, the other major most actively involved in the acquisition of television stations, has a healthy 7.8 per cent share of the domestic household market.

What the NCTA finds most galling, however, is the majors' share of the video rental market—in 1985, a whopping 68.4 per cent, with rentals totalling nearly $1.15 billion. It also resents the MPAA's attempt to restrict both the networks and independent video companies from expanding their holdings by charging them with engaging in monopolistic practices. We seem to be witnessing the old tactic that the best defence is a strong offence.

Through a series of court actions begun in 1973, the MPAA has been able to limit the networks' programming, syndication and total programme hours while at the same time increasing its own share of the pie. In 1986-87, the major studios (most of the original Big Eight with newer additions like Lorimar and Tri-Star, the latter now fused with Columbia) controlled 48.6 per cent of the weekly revenue fees and 51.5 per cent of the total weekly minutes of programming. The majors also tried to get the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to back away from a series of rulings it had sponsored to secure more open competition in the television marketplace. One of these FCC proposals was the repeal of the so-called 'Rule of Sevens' which prohibited ownership of more than seven AM, FM and TV stations by any single television network. (Not seven total, but seven each.)

When the networks received the FCC's support for repealing the Rule of Sevens, the MPAA cried foul. The FCC's reasoning had been that relaxation of the rule would help to make the networks more competitive with the majors, who had already made significant gains in the television markets. Without blinking an eye to the possible irony of the pot calling the kettle black, the MPAA's Jack Valenti said that the FCC's actions smacked of possible anti-trust liability. 'They [the networks] are the distributors of the product and they're the producers of the product . . . that's vertical integration. It doesn't exist in the movie industry.' One can only imagine the gales of laughter from the regulars in the Polo Lounge.

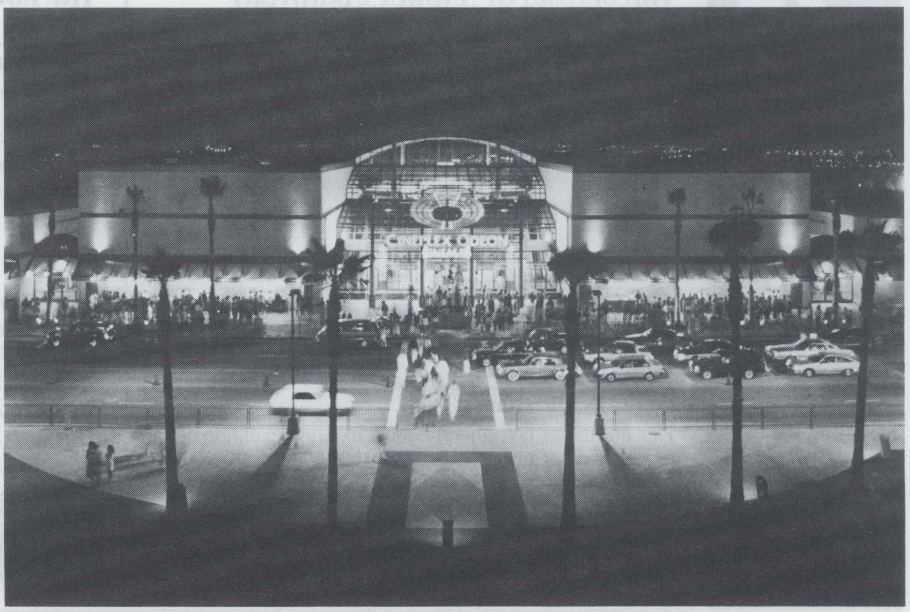
Although the FCC dismissed the MPAA's objections, Valenti, who was schooled in lobbying by the absolute master of arm-twisting, Lyndon Baines Johnson, for whom he worked as press secretary, began working Capitol Hill in support of the studios. His efforts proved fruitful. In August 1984, Congress blocked the revised ownership rulings of the FCC, eventually settling for a compromise Rule of Twelves. Mark Fowler, the FCC chairman, lamented the action: 'Apparently Jack Valenti's Big Lie technique works . . . this is a dollars issue for Jack and Hollywood.'

The majors were also busy on the video front. First, they petitioned the US Supreme Court to prohibit the sale of VCRs, saying that this fostered copyright infringement. (Shades of 1915; turnabout is fair play.) In 1984 the Court ruled against them (Sony Corporation of America vs. Universal City Studios, Inc). Then the MPAA proposed the levy of user fees on the machines. In effect, however, the video revolution has not proved the threat some people expected to the theatrical market; what it has done is increase the majors' earning power.

When the video explosion began (1980 is the accepted date), the majors took a look at the success of outfits like Home Box Office and Cinemax and apparently decided that the video market was too rich to go unexploited. Again resorting to one of their time-tested (though since outlawed) strategies, the horizontally integrated joint venture, a number of them banded together to create a new channel called Premiere, to which they would grant an exclusive licence to show their films after the theatrical market had been exhausted. After nine months on Premiere, the films could then be licensed to other independent cable services, who would consequently be getting the crumbs long after the public had devoured the cake.

The Carter Justice Department intervened in 1980, bringing suit against this consortium of Hollywood's Old Guard—Columbia, MCA/Universal, Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox and Getty Oil. An injunction was filed in which all the old charges recurred: price-fixing conspiracy, restraint of trade, vertical and horizontal monopoly. But the defeat, when Premiere was enjoined by the courts from operation, proved only a temporary setback, and

Showplace for the 80s: Cineplex Odeon at Universal City.



with the Reagan presidency the Justice Department changed its tune. First, it backed away from its opposition to the consortium's attempt to purchase the Movie Channel (an alternative to the Premiere deal); then it gave the green light to violation of the consent decrees which the studios had been forced to enter into in the wake of the Paramount Decision. In July 1986, the Justice Department formally announced that it would not oppose the acquisition of retail theatre chains by the majors. 'The 1948 consent decrees are outdated,' Justice said, 'and if anyone spends the money to challenge them, the antitrust division won't argue.' The statement probably saved the majors millions in legal fees. The stampede was now officially sanctioned.

While the heart of Hollywood still remains in the vine-choked hills below the new Hollywood sign, the nerve and financial centre has moved from the Gower Gulch to Wall Street and Fifth Avenue. The moguls no longer issue such threatening pronouncements as 'Producers shouldn't get ulcers, they should give them', and your New Hollywood type is just as likely to work for Shearson Lehman Bros as for Paramount. But essentially, as with all the great Hollywood stories, the majors are reworking a formula script. And the independents, so strong during the 1970s, are hoping to be able to survive the New-Old Order.

Not that all independents think the studios' theatrical acquisitions are a bad thing. 'I don't think the credible independent producers will be very much affected,' says Judd Bernard, producer of *Blue*, *Point Blank* and the forthcoming *Blood Red*. 'You have to remember that the motion picture business is basically a dollars and cents business; [the takeovers] give the studios a surety that someone will accept their product.' As for the large number of independently produced films that have gone unreleased, Bernard argues that 'most of these films are not terribly good pictures, and the public should be grateful it doesn't have to be subjected to them.' Bernard went on to say that he thought the theatrical acquisitions were 'a very good idea' and believes the majors will continue to develop this strategy. Orion's Joel Resnick said, 'I don't know if the trend will continue . . . I guess any deal they [the majors] can make a financial return on is a good deal.' As for how the public might be affected, Resnick offered 'No comment.'

Although 1987 has been a slower year than 1986, the majors' acquisition of retail theatres is still proceeding at a steady clip. Although Tri-Star has apparently decided to put off its bid to acquire the United Artists' theatre chain (a modest little deal of half a billion dollars for 1,400 screens), the company plans 'to expand our presence in the theatrical exhibition market by using Loew's [another chain they recently acquired] as our base, and adding additional screens and acquisitions targeted to specific markets.' Warners is planning to franchise 'exclusive outlets' to guarantee play time for its releases. Cineplex Odeon is currently set to open a mall complex in Universal City that will offer viewers a total of 5,940 seats in eighteen theatres. It's a luxurious bit of old-fashioned movie indulgence, with marble columns, chrome railings, hundreds of feet of flashing neon and a number of garden cafés, which the *Los Angeles Times* compared favourably to such 1920s showplaces as the Hollywood Egyptian and Graumann's Chinese. Just one more brassy sign proclaiming the majors' resurrection. In Hollywood, as recent history shows, some legends die hard. Some, in fact, don't die at all. ■

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HOUSEKEEPING

Andrea Burchill (Lucille), Sara Walker (Ruth) and Christine Lahti (Sylvie).

When Diane Keaton withdrew as the lead in Bill Forsyth's new film *Housekeeping*, the backers Cannon rapidly followed suit. The sets were built, the crew in place. Forsyth turned to his friend David Puttnam, then on the point of taking control at Columbia. Puttnam had earlier turned down the project—Forsyth's own adaptation of Marilynne Robinson's novel about two orphaned sisters and their divergent paths, set in the 1950s and 60s in a lakeside community in the American Northwest—but now he changed his mind. Why? 'This was not really a Columbia picture,' Forsyth said, 'but we had worked together and he agreed to back it on the understanding that I would make it for a small sum, the budget was then $5m (it rose to $5.4m), and that I would direct a more straightforwardly commercial film for him at some unspecified future date. Of course I agreed, but nothing was put in writing, and when he arrived at Columbia this was the first project to be given the go-ahead, and it went ahead very quickly. There was no red tape.'

Housekeeping had its premiere at the Tokyo film festival, where it received script and special jury awards. In a Mayfair hotel, on his way home from Japan to Scotland, Forsyth unpacked one of his enamelled prize vases, slightly dented by the baggage-handlers. Tokyo gave its top prize—16m yen (some $140,000)—to Harry Hook's *The Kitchen Toto*. Forsyth was well pleased with his trophies, but, he added, 'It's us older directors who need the money . . .'

Had the ordinary Japanese liked *Housekeeping*? It had been hard to judge, though he had been told that they had. He was not sure how familiar the Japanese were with his previous films, or with his tone of voice—though the new film was not, strictly speaking, like his others. Forsyth quoted an old Japanese joke: a man goes into a fish-shop, later he tells his friends about it. He was puzzled by this Forsythian jest. What had drawn him to *Housekeeping*—

John Pym

Marilynne Robinson.

a consciously crafted, deceptively low-key first novel written by a teacher of English at Smith College, which since its publication in 1981 has gained a following and found its way on to high-school and university reading-lists? He had read it (before making *Comfort and Joy*), and it had struck a chord. He had shown it to Diane Keaton, as a book she might like to read, not thinking she would see a part in it. By 1985 there was a script; Keaton was still interested; and Cannon, Forsyth said, were in the mood to dignify themselves with class. And the star's withdrawal? Forsyth is circumspect, 'I don't think I wooed her enough.'

Christine Lahti—an actress unencumbered with the mixed blessing of an ineradicable screen personality—was shortly afterwards cast as Sylvie, the vagrant aunt who is summoned to the town of Fingerbone to take care of the teenage sisters, Ruth (the story's narrator) and Lucille, following the death of their grandmother, in whose charge they have been left after the suicide of their mother Helen. Shooting took place in Nelson, British Columbia, a million miles from Los Angeles. In the cuttings file there was only one reference to the production of *Housekeeping*, an interview with Forsyth in the *Glasgow Herald*. Had he shunned publicity? Not at all, he said, glancing at the Columbia press officer; he hoped the film would not be perceived as coming from nowhere. But in his heart, one imagines, this most modest of British

film-makers cannot really have minded being left to get on with the job minus the attentions of the colour supplements.

Housekeeping is Forsyth's first film wholly shot in North America and is a significant turning point for a director still principally known for his comic range, for the deadpan absurdity of *That Sinking Feeling*, the affecting sentimentality of *Gregory's Girl*, the magical whimsy of *Local Hero* and the wry melancholy of *Comfort and Joy*. The new film is threaded with humour; but the comic moments are never imposed and never highlighted. 'David Puttnam expressed reservations at first because, I think, the book is quite a gloomy read. But I wanted to make a sad film—not because I wanted to make a *sad* film, but because that's what the story called for. If I was pressed to describe the tone of the film, I'd quote the scene in which Lucille decides to play truant from school because she cannot bring herself to hand in the ridiculously implausible note Sylvie has written accounting for her previous day's diplomatic illness. Ruth announces that she will keep her company by the lake. "But then we'll both be in trouble," Lucille says. To which Ruth's voice adds: "The prospect seemed oddly familiar and comfortable." That sums up something about the picture for me.'

Like Forsyth's previous features, *Housekeeping* is rooted absolutely in place, that particular space and vacancy of the Northwest. It was necessary to build a set for the house, so that it could be flooded calf-deep in brown water. 'It was very important for Christine that she believed and was at home in this set, and in making herself believe in its reality she was very helpful to the girls.' In the early stages, it seemed that producer Robert Colesberry (*After Hours*, *The King of Comedy*) might have secured Norwegian backing. There was a recce. 'But,' Forsyth said, 'Norwegians don't look the same as Americans on skates.' Sandpoint, Idaho, Marilynne Robinson's hometown and the model for Fingerbone, was investigated and some research done in the town library. 'There was a newspaper story about a woman who jumped off a bridge, as Sylvie almost does in the film. Here was the gossipy tone of smalltown life and the sense of extreme gesture against it that I was looking for.'

Disney, rumour had it, was interested in the project in its early days. A script was despatched, but then, Forsyth said, 'pure silence'. Had he tried to make his presence felt in Hollywood? 'I feel quite proud of having spent only two nights in Los Angeles.' Columbia, however, had behaved exemplarily, which is to say they had not interfered. 'Sandpoint is a lumbertown and one difficulty we faced when talking up the project was that it sounded like a "barnyard movie"—from the same stable as *The River* or *Country*—which was not what I had in mind at all. *Housekeeping* was different from what I'd done before, it was my first adaptation. In a sense, however, I felt I was making a promo for the novel; I had no ego as a film-maker as far as this project was concerned. I wanted to be as faithful to the original as possible.' The crew had collaborated before: costume designer Mary-Jane Reyner, editor Michael Ellis and script supervisor Pat Rambaut worked on *Comfort and Joy*, while production designer Adrienne Atkinson and director of photography Michael Coulter had worked on all Forsyth's previous films.

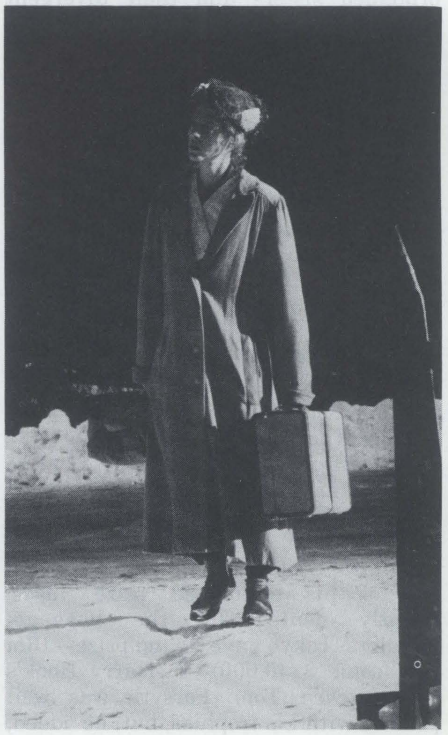
Leah Penny and Tonya Tanner (the sisters as children) with Margot Pinvidic (their mother Helen).

Housekeeping, whose unhurried pace is in tune with the novel's sense of time being marked rather than passing, is notably faithful to its original. And the detailing is made to count: the plaid of the girls' jackets is cut, it seems, this being a small town, from the same bolt that was used for the bags of a row of vacuum-cleaners displayed in a shop window. Marilynne Robinson visited the set and pronounced on its accuracy. 'She said it was like stepping into her dreams.' Had she approved of the finished picture? Forsyth thought so—'but she did say I had been harsh on Lucille, the sister who opts for a normal life, leaving Sylvie and Ruthie to go their own way and at last break away from Fingerbone. Lucille, Marilynne felt, had her reasons, too.'

Like *Hope and Glory*, another 'memory' picture by a British director plucked from the fire by David Puttnam's Columbia, *Housekeeping* is notable as a correctly scaled Hollywood investment. Like John Boorman's film, it knows when to deploy space—the railway bridge across the lake, although built by the construction crew, looks the part; Helen's almost lyrical bumpity-bump ride over the precipice is shot in such a way that the moment means something. But at the same time, *Housekeeping* has been permitted a medium, if not exactly a small scale. It boils down to the story of two girls, nothing very special about them, except perhaps that they have individual faces and know their own minds, and how they react to living with a scatty aunt, a couple of steps up from a train-hopping hobo, singularly unsuited to 'housekeeping'.

'Barnyard movies' tend to have messages and star players. *Housekeeping*, which makes much of the natural world and the ease with which it can upend civilisation, has a big theme—the uncertainty of every life, the unreliability of memory, the vanity of 'housekeeping'—but its approach is as elusive as those mysterious children, hiding in the woods, for whom Sylvie always carries a pocketful of broken crackers. It is a film very much of fleeting moments. What

Christine Lahti: Sylvie's arrival.



Andrea Burchill and Sara Walker: At the train station.

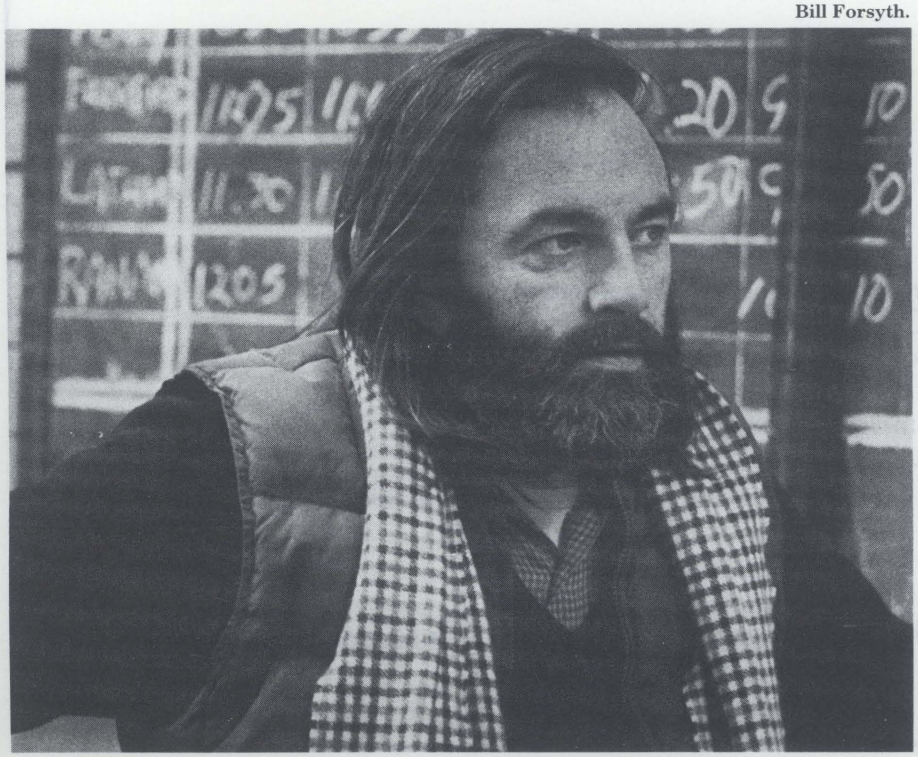
was Forsyth's own favourite moment? 'When the girls follow Sylvie to the station on the morning after her arrival in Fingerbone, and when they face each other in the waiting-room and she makes the decision to stay. Nothing is really said. The whole sequence of them picking their way after their aunt, the place names on the blackboard behind her.'

Forsyth is a director with a taste for unexpected lyricism: the conclusion of Gregory's epic quest for his girl being, perhaps, the most perfectly realised example of this to date. *Housekeeping* is studded with these unexpected moments: Helen driving her sleeping daughters to her mother's house, singing a snatch of 'Goodnight, Irene', its insouciant reference to a suicide later echoed in her own death, which is itself an echo of another death, her father's. A railman, he was on the train which one winter night famously jumped the rails on the Fingerbone bridge. Why had *Housekeeping* struck a chord with Forsyth? This incident, summoned up in the book, offers a clue. What floated up from the wreckage through the hole in the ice, but a suitcase, a seat cushion and a cabbage: the sort of surreal collection which Forsyth, who once invented a daring raid on a warehouse containing a consignment of stainless-steel sinks, would surely have conjured up, if Marilynne Robinson had not beaten him to the mark.

Forsyth is admirably served by his two girls, Sara Walker (Ruth) and Andrea Burchill (Lucille). Had they heard of their Scottish director before? 'I don't think they had seen any of my films, but as soon as we cast them, they went off to the video library.' Forsyth has a light and proven touch with the young, and that touch has not deserted him in *Housekeeping*. One never tires of looking at these girls, and chalk and cheese though they are, their performances dovetail. Neither puts a foot wrong. Forsyth's other proven strength is his eye for the detail in the corner of the frame: the immensely fat cats that pad about the house, apparently ignored by everyone; the disapproving look cast by the vacuum salesman at Sylvie on her way to the train station—he has just put out a placard announcing 'If you really want to please her/Buy your wife a fridge and a freezer.'

Impinging on the closed and increasingly eccentric world of Sylvie, valiantly battling to do things right (she washes every tin, saves every newspaper), is a nosey world of outsiders; and it is in sketching these characters that Forsyth reveals a previously hidden talent as an acute social satirist. A bevy of pious church ladies making a reason to call on the abstracted Sylvie; an unctuous sheriff; a concerned headmaster doing the best he can: Forsyth etches these characters with startling clarity—and in the case of the sheriff, ghastly clarity. At one point, Lucille, driven to distraction by her aunt's woolliness and determined to be like other girls, does up her hair and that of her sister (recalcitrant curls), and takes them both off to the drugstore. The dun colours of the house suddenly give way to light, movement, bright colours, 'Sh-boom' playing in the background. Ruthie, carrying her deserted mother's pain and Sylvie's anguished inability to fit, turns on her heels and flees.

Bill Forsyth.



The measure of Forsyth's achievement is, perhaps, that he and his team have made a 'British' picture in North America from an American novel which pleased (or at least seemed to please) a Japanese audience. It is not, perhaps, quite the sort of picture that Colin Welland had in mind when he uttered that fateful cry—a cry which came to haunt David Puttnam—'The British are Coming!' But it is the sort of picture we do well, when we come to do it. Touching, crafted, deeply felt, well acted, not obviously wearing its heart on its sleeve, amused; an oddity, all its own. Puttnam's testament?

What were Forsyth's future plans? Dylan Thomas had written a script for Gainsborough Pictures in 1948. *Rebecca's Daughters*, about some Pembrokeshire tearaways in the 1840s who had gone about destroying tollgates. It was to be a comedy, a period piece, though he had vowed never to do a period piece. He planned to shoot in Scotland. His colleagues had been put on stand-by. Chris Sievernich, the resourceful independent producer, was even as we spoke raising the money. ■

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IN STEREO! The Sound of Money

MICHAEL ARICK

On the night of 29 September 1954, 20,000 people lined the streets in front of the Pantages Theatre in Hollywood for what proved to be the last great studio premiere—Warner Brothers' *A Star Is Born*. It was to be Judy Garland's comeback vehicle, her brightest hour on film. And so, naturally, *A Star Is Born* was produced with the very finest elements. CinemaScope. Technicolor. And a new, perfectly balanced 4-channel stereo soundtrack. More than any other element that night, it was this 'sound' which thrilled the audience when Judy Garland sang, 'in stereo' for the first time.

Yet, when the film finished its run a few months later, its master negatives were separated and stored away, and that glorious sound was literally lost for thirty years. Like hundreds of other stereo soundtracks produced for films during the 1950s and 60s, the stereo master for *A Star Is Born* fell victim to shrinkage, deterioration, and perhaps the most wasteful policy of studio neglect since the early silent period. Today, as a direct result of that policy, dozens of these old soundtracks have been lost forever and many more are nearing a point of total disintegration.

More than any other technical innovation, stereo sound has been dependent on the financial ups and downs of the film industry. Stereo has been both product and victim of declining box-office receipts. Its impact in the theatres, however, introduced consumer stereo into the home. How fitting, then, that it is Hi-Fi homevideo, and not the studios, which is finally restoring these neglected tracks to their full glory.

The idea of a stereo, or multi-channel, sound delivery system evolved naturally from the invention of the telephone and its ability to transmit a single channel of sound. 'Stereo' sound simply

***A Star Is Born*: Judy Garland sings for the first time 'in stereo'.**

required two or more telephonic connections arranged in proper perspective to the sound source. In 1881—a few years before Edison's first Kinetograph and a full forty-five years before *The Jazz Singer*—a French scientist, Clément Ader, devised an ingenious exhibit for the Palais d'Industrie in Paris, by which the sounds of a live opera performance were transmitted via telephone wire to primitive stereo headsets. Ader's subjects could clearly distinguish the elements of the performance—voice, orchestra, applause—and from these were able to 'imagine' the dimensions and depth of the actual auditorium. Though conceived as a stunt, Ader's experiment was actually the first use of modern technology to explore psychoacoustics—the natural phenomenon by which the brain takes sound cues from multiple sources, compares them, and then constructs their apparent field of depth.

Fifty years later, the motion picture had evolved from a similar novelty into a full-fledged industry. After much trial and error with synchronised phonograph recordings, the variable density process actually photographed sound, in fluttering shades of gray, on to an optical soundtrack which ran adjacent to the film image. The process was developed by Western Electric which, in 1925, wisely teamed with Warner Brothers in that studio's strategy to introduce sound films gradually through vaudeville shorts and newsreels. These shorts were so popular that Warners and Western Electric established an effective monopoly in the process as well as the performing talent contracted to make them. By the time other studios caught on and converted to sound features, Western Electric was able to impose its established process as the industry standard and made a fortune selling the necessary sound equipment to exhibitors.

Thousands of theatre-owners resisted this costly and risky conversion to sound, and many producers feared that English dialogue would severely limit their overseas markets. The novelty of sound, however, created an unprecedented boom at the box-office, and a flood of funds and creative talent flowed through the studios. The variable density process was refined with remarkable speed and, by 1939, had virtually met the limits of the existing microphone technology. However, once 35mm optical sound had been accepted as the industry standard, there was extreme resistance for years to further refinements, such as bilateral (stereo) optical tracks, that would require modifications to the already expensive equipment. Thus, while optical stereo sound was technically possible from the earliest sound days, its value in exhibition was not appreciated.

Stereo soundtracks evolved gradually from the prevailing style of film scoring in Hollywood during the 1930s and 40s. Once the studios realised that musical underscoring greatly enhanced their talking films, they quickly assembled large and efficient music divisions. The demands of composing thirty to fifty minutes of original music for each assignment called for a talent that was both prolific and highly specialised. The pioneering masters—Alfred Newman, Max Steiner, Franz Waxman, George Korngold, Miklos Rosza, Victor Young, Dimitri Tiomkin, Bernard Herrmann—established a style that was decidedly symphonic and noted for its lengthy musical cues. Through their compositions, and the work of their key orchestrators, each studio evolved its own distinctive sound.

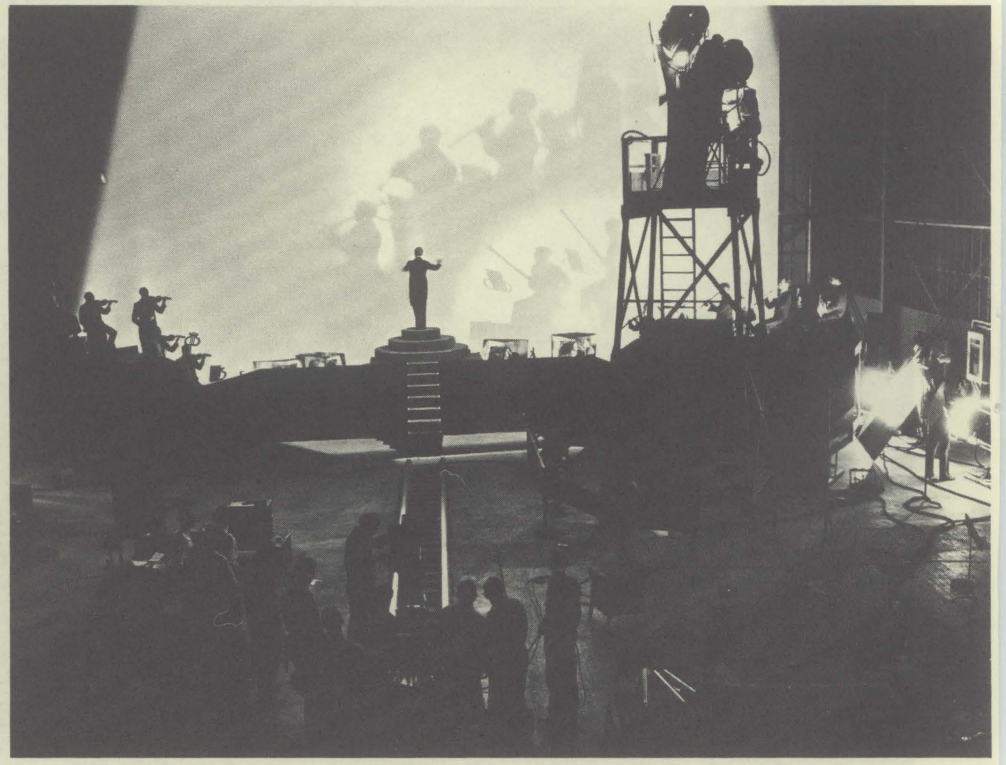
Certain major productions of the 1930s required elaborate musical treatment with greatly expanded orchestrations. To capture the full range and colour of these scores, multi-mike configurations were devised that recorded the various instrumental sections on as many as three or four separate tracks. These tracks were then synchronised and later remixed into a single master orchestral track. Rouben Mamoulian claims to have pioneered a 2-track version of this process for *Applause* (1929). *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) followed, with elaborate scores requiring partial 2- and 3-track orchestral recordings. The crude multi-channel recordings that resulted were in fact the very first use of synchronised stereo recording in feature film production.

The first use of multi-channel exhibition came in 1940 when Warners introduced VitaSound. The studio produced two films in the process—*Santa Fe Trail* and *Four Wives*—and installed expensive 'three-dimensional' sound systems in their two flagship theatres. The VitaSound system employed three separate speakers behind the screen (left, centre, right), and through the use of a physical notch on the film print 'shunted' the sound from dead centre to the extreme speakers whenever the orchestra played a lengthy cue. During the screening, the dialogue remained anchored to centre screen while the score rose majestically in and out of the side channels. In this manner, VitaSound created the effect of an enlarged pit orchestra that accentuated the on-screen artifice. Unfortunately, the threat of war and stiff resistance by theatre-owners forced Warners to abandon their fledgling process.

It was left to Walt Disney, then, to introduce true 3-channel stereo sound reproduction for the first time in *Fantasia* (1942). To secure the collaboration of conductor Leopold Stokowski for what he originally envisaged as an animated short, Disney agreed to develop a three-dimensional sound process along the lines of Stokowski's own 1926 experiments in 'auditory perspective' with Bell Laboratories. During a tour of the Disney Studio, Stokowski had been fascinated with the mixing console and the many different ways it could blend up to six channels of sound into a final master track.

Dubbing this 'the ultimate form of conducting', Stokowski persuaded Disney greatly to expand his original concept to include a broad range of symphonic music which would be recorded in a suitably dazzling stereo process. Disney's sound technicians worked with RCA engineers to devise the Fantasound system, which recorded the separate instrumental sections of the orchestra on to nine optical soundtracks. Stokowski then mixed these nine tracks down

***Fantasia* (1942): Stokowski, the orchestra and the film crew.**



into three discrete tracks which were combined, with an elaborate control track, on to a separate 35mm soundreel. During presentation of *Fantasia*, this soundtrack was interlocked with the projected picture, and the control track routed the three channels to three speakers behind the screen and 96 'surround' speakers dispersed throughout the house.

The cost of producing *Fantasia*'s soundtrack alone was $400,000, nearly the entire budget for an average 1942 programme feature. The additional cost of equipping a theatre to reproduce Fantasound ran to $45,000. Naturally this precluded the practical transfer of the process to feature production and exhibition. Installation of the Fantasound system was limited to 14 theatres in 1942, and it was not until its 1956 re-release that *Fantasia* was widely presented in stereo.

After the war, box-office receipts fell sharply. Attendance patterns were shifting, competition for a shrinking box-office dollar became, for the first time, a real factor and the studios searched desperately for the 'innovations' that would attract audiences. David O. Selznick was the first producer to reach back and adapt Fantasound. In 1939, Selznick had contemplated adding stereo sound to the Burning of Atlanta sequence in *Gone With the Wind*. The estimated costs of the process had discouraged him, but he was determined to use stereo as a sensational means of marketing and presenting his otherwise ethereal *Portrait of Jenny* (1948). The film was made with standard optical sound, but awesome effects were produced for the storm sequence in the final reel. These were recorded on a discrete optical track, projected in interlock with the main print, and then fed to a barrage of speakers arranged throughout the house. While appropriately thunderous, these effects were somewhat incongruous with the overall tone of the film, and neither *Portrait of Jenny* nor the new sound process was a great success.

Finally, in 1952, full directional stereo sound was introduced to a large popular audience through the success of Cinerama. Developed by Merian C. Cooper and Lowell Thomas, the Cinerama process used three 35mm prints, which were shot and projected in precise register at a slightly advanced speed on to a trademark, 165 degree curved screen. Cinerama overwhelmed the viewer's peripheral vision with the startling illusion of true depth. Wisely, Cooper and Thomas decided to develop a tandem stereo sound process, and for this they turned to Hazard Reeves, a sound engineer who had been struck by Fantasound's untapped potential. Reeves' company adapted the new magnetic sound recording techniques, a product of the German war machine, into a process that greatly expanded upon the RCA 3-track system.

Magnetic recording techniques significantly improved the clarity, tone and dynamic range of captured sound, and suffered less degradation through successive generations, thus proving ideal for feature film production. Reeves developed a process that recorded seven discrete channels, in true perspective, on to a single 35mm filmstrip fully coated with magnetic oxides. During presentation, this soundtrack was again projected in interlock with the three components of Cinerama's picture. Three speakers were arranged across the widescreen (far left, centre, far right), with an additional three arranged around the periphery of the house. Cinerama's seventh channel was a 'phantom' track that shifted between the main six channels. This intricate system contributed greatly to Cinerama's overall impact, and people everywhere began to hear about its new 'ultra-high fidelity', 'stereophonic', 'surround' sound.

Cinerama, in all its elements, was of course enormously complicated and ill-suited to feature production. Its immediate popular success, however, quickly signalled to the studios that its most basic elements—widescreen and stereo sound—could be profitably adapted. The earliest steps in this direction coincided with the shortlived Polaroid 3-D process, which achieved a three-dimensional depth using standard aspect 35mm film. *House of Wax* (1953) and *Kiss Me Kate* (1953) were designed and produced with stereo sound to exploit fully their visual depth. Both films used an improved magnetic version of the RCA 3-track process, projected again in interlock with the picture. *Kiss Me Kate* was actually recorded in true stereo on the set at MGM, while *House of Wax* played tricks with its mono optical dialogue track and full stereo orchestral tracks. Predictably, the imperfections of the cumbersome Polaroid process, and the refusal of most theatre-owners to install the RCA system for such a doubtful enterprise, severely limited these pictures' stereo release.

In 1952, Universal Pictures recognised the value of stereo apart from 3-D and made it an integral element in the development of *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954). Rather than use Miller's original RCA Bluebird recordings, which were of course in mono, Universal rerecorded his arrangements in full 4-track stereo. At the time this was not unusual, as Twentieth Century-Fox had begun to produce all musical tracks in true 3- or 4-channel perspective. Columbia Pictures followed suit by dubbing a newly rechannelled 'stereo' effects track on to its 1946 hit, *The Jolson Story*, and other studios created artificial stereo for their big films by panning mono soundtracks between speakers in a fashion similar to Vita-Sound. *From Here to Eternity*, *Julius Caesar*, *Mogambo* and *Shane* (all 1953) were among several films released with ersatz stereo.

The first studio successfully to adapt Cinerama's exhibition values into a commercially viable industry standard was Twentieth Century-Fox, which introduced CinemaScope in September 1953. Utilising an anamorphic lens, the CinemaScope process 'squeezed' an extremely wide (2x) image into the standard 35mm frame. The result was a greatly expanded field of vision, comparable to Cinerama yet fully compatible with existing production standards. Fox learned that other studios were developing variations on its process, and by rushing the less than perfect CinemaScope into the theatres, the

***Fantasia* (1982): Irwin Kostal conducts for the new Dolby soundtrack.**

studio established an exhibition foothold that effectively precluded other contenders, principally WarnerScope. This proved significant for stereo sound, since Fox president Spyros Skouras insisted that CinemaScope incorporated a 4-track stereo sound process that would in every practical way rival that of Cinerama. Skouras further demanded that all films shot in the process be designed with 4-track stereo, and that all theatres projecting the aspect be equipped to reproduce stereo. The 1948 Anti-Trust ruling had long since stripped Fox of its power to force theatres to install stereo sound systems. Conversion to 4-track stereo required delicate 'penthouse' soundheads and amplification systems costing $25,000. Already forced into licensing the process, MGM and Warners did not want to impose such a costly stereo on theatre-owners and thereby weaken CinemaScope's chances at success. Fortunately, Skouras remained adamant.

CinemaScope made compromises in adapting Cinerama to 35mm production, but nevertheless made for an extremely elegant presentation of sight and sound. The immense success of the process, beginning with *The Robe* in 1953, was due partly to its remarkable sound system. Determined to place the soundtrack back on the film print, Fox engineers developed a technique which embossed four individual magnetic stripes on to a fully developed 35mm CinemaScope print. Four discrete soundtracks were then transferred from a 4-track fullcoat master, a single stripe at a time. The additional width required by these stripes necessitated a new sprocket arrangement, the Fox Perforation. The process yielded a single-strip stereo print which was expensive to produce and did not wear well. When run through projectors at the standard 90 feet per minute, the magnetic stripes wore away long before the picture itself deteriorated; and the delicate Fox Perforation caused the prints literally to tear apart in the hands of an inexperienced projectionist.

The dazzling CinemaScope 4-track sound was well worth the trouble. Like Cinerama, the process used three speakers behind the screen (left, centre, right), but settled for a single surround channel which was fed to an array of speakers throughout the house. The CinemaScope films produced by Fox made full use of the system and exploited the widescreen by shifting dialogue and effects from extreme right to extreme left. In order to anchor dialogue and action to the screen, the process permitted no directional sound between the screen and the surround channel, which was used primarily for orchestration and secondary effects. Other studios never fully understood the use of the surround channel and often mixed little else than orchestration into it. Because a 'silent' or empty surround track actually hissed quite loudly, a control cue was recorded into the track that would engage the surround amp during appropriate passages. As a result, the surround speakers often 'kicked in' at full volume. Designed to be unobtrusive, the surround track tended to enlarge certain moments by creating the highly theatrical effect of a pit orchestra. In *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955), for instance, the surround elements were very conservative until Doris Day's numbers, which 'opened up' with full 4-track orchestration.

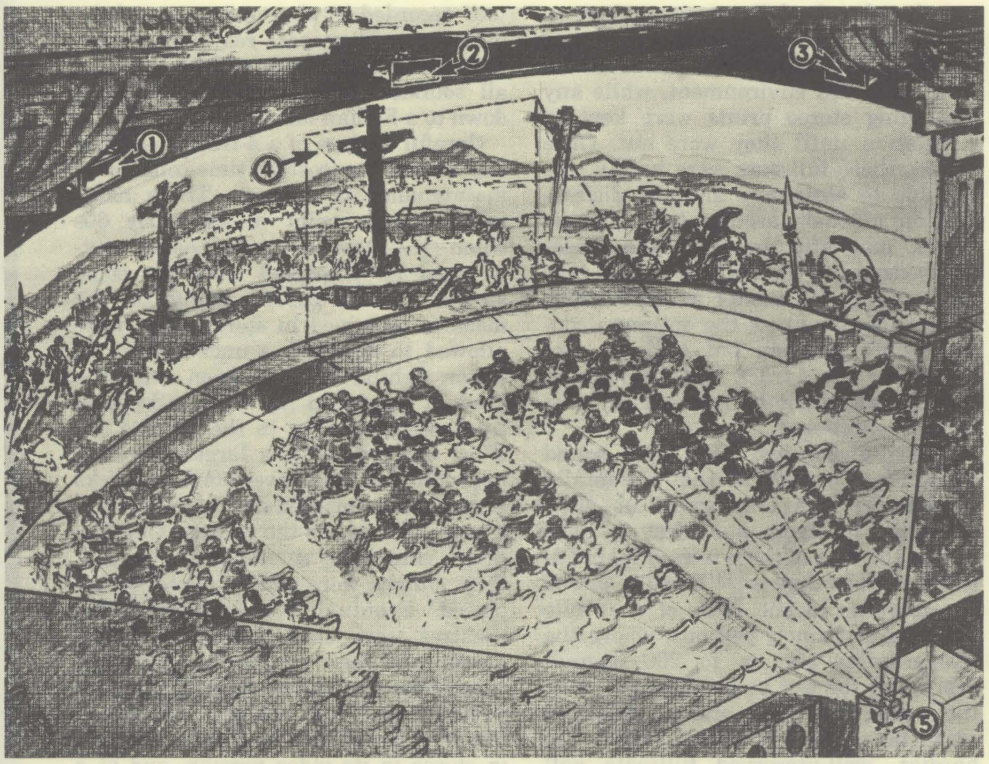
***Kiss Me Kate*: 3-D, stereo sound and Ann Miller.**

Whereas Cinerama's goal of total realism required that all sound be recorded with a minimum of artificial processing, CinemaScope's refinement of its surround channel proved the natural extension of the symphonic school of film scoring. As a result, CinemaScope stereo eventually became as 'Hollywooden' as the most garish Technicolor. And again, as studios produced their own CinemaScope features, each began to evolve its own unique 4-track sound. Beginning with *The Robe*, and continuing through *Anastasia* (1956) and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959), Alfred Newman created a sound that remains uniquely 'Fox'. A healthy delay interval was introduced into the rear channel, which gave the overall mix a depth rarely present in the sound work of other studios.

Warners introduced a progressive strain with Leonard Rosenman's scores for *East of Eden* (1954) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), which brilliantly fused a simple romanticism with a harsh, 'beat' sound. Broadway musical hits were a profitable staple during the 1950s, and some of the best 4-track mixes were created for these productions. *Guys and Dolls* (1955), *Brigadoon* (1954) and *Kismet* (1955) had sound that was big, brassy and bright; by comparison, Fox's treatment of *Carousel* (1955) and *The King and I* (1956) was expansive. For *Gigi* (1958), MGM went to the furthest extreme to perfect its 4-track sound. After the film had been completed and previewed, the composer Frederick Loewe felt that its orchestrations were too lush. At great expense, the offending orchestral tracks were removed, and a reduced orchestration was re-recorded into the mix. The result captured exactly the sharp, brilliant tones of a Broadway orchestra, and remains today the studio's finest expression of the 4-track stereo sound.

Fox did finally relax its standards for CinemaScope and compulsory stereo eventually faded. As a result, CinemaScope was by 1958 the industry standard, and thousands of domestic and foreign theatres were equipped at least to project its picture. The single holdout was Paramount Pictures, which argued that the anamorphic lenses produced too grainy a picture. Paramount developed VistaVision, its own widescreen variant which achieved the sharpness of a 70mm image by exposing two 35mm frames horizontally. Paramount hailed this improvement as 'Motion Picture High Fidelity', yet eschewed any form of magnetic stereo sound. This was doubly ironic as Loren Ryder had been awarded a technical Oscar in 1950 for converting all Paramount's productions to magnetic-striped film. Paramount chose instead to employ a synthetic stereo process developed by Fairchild Camera and known as PerspectaSound.

Often dismissed as sonically inferior,



***The Robe*: a 1953 diagram showing screen size and the placing of stereo speakers.**

PerspectaSound was actually an ingenious process that stretched the single standard optical soundtrack to its limits. Using the familiar spread of three onscreen speakers and an array of additional surround speakers, PerspectaSound shifted its sound back and forth through the inclusion of an elaborate control track. In this manner, a rudimentary illusion of directional sound was achieved, and a print was far less expensive to produce and exhibit than a magnetic stereo print. Unfortunately, PerspectaSound was limited to the weak dynamic range of its optical track and, with all its speakers engaged, was incapable of full, true stereo sound. The process was abandoned, though, for another reason. In the field, it was found that projectors very often ran at speeds of slightly more or less than 24 frames per second, altering the control cues enough to defeat the PerspectaSound decoder.

Nearly all films shot in VistaVision were produced without true stereo. Surprising examples of this policy are *White Christmas* (1954), *High Society* (1955), *Vertigo* (1958), *Funny Face* (1958) and *North by Northwest* (1959). The notable exception was Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) which, at the director's insistence, utilised a new, ultra-Hi-Fi 6-track process developed for TODD-AO. Like VistaVision, TODD-AO employed a larger (65mm) negative to achieve its sharper picture. Mike Todd's engineers further refined the 4-track sound process by adding two more front channels (left centre and right centre) which more accurately placed dialogue and effects on the screen. In answer, Fox promptly introduced its own prohibitively expensive CinemaScope 55 process, and other variations soon followed (Technirama 70, Super VistaVision, Camera 65) until Panavision settled in as the industry standard in the early 1960s.

These large negative processes all adopted the 6-track stereo system, making their prints even more expensive to produce. The cost to theatres of 6-track conversion proved exorbitant, and stereo suffered for these refinements. During the 1960s, stereo was increasingly reserved for epic, roadshow productions. *Spartacus* (1960), *West Side Story* (1961), *My Fair Lady* (1964), *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1968) and *Hello Dolly* (1970) were all released to a limited number of theatres in the 70mm 6-track format. While a few 35mm 4-track versions were prepared for neighbourhood houses, most theatres projected the standard 35mm optical sound versions. As the major studios continued to lose revenue during the 1960s, even these roadshows grew scarce. By the early 1970s, innovative films that cried out for stereo—*Cabaret*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Chinatown*, *The Godfather*, *The Conversation*—were routinely produced in mono.

Stereo remained in limbo until 1975, when Dolby Labs introduced its Cinema Surround Sound Processor. Working with a new generation of film-makers, and challenged by an explosion of onscreen special effects, Dolby developed a 4-channel process that, for the first time, introduced the element of *directional* sound between its front and surround channels. Dolby engineers recognised that many theatres continued to maintain their vintage 4-track amplification systems, even though 4-track magnetic prints and soundhead assemblies were all but extinct. Wisely, they designed their system to conform with this equipment, and set about adapting an economical and simplified 35mm process that would be readily accepted into smaller theatres.

Completely sidestepping 4- or even 2-track magnetic stereo, Dolby refined the bilateral variable area optical sound standard, dating back to the 1930s, into a stereo process. The two optical tracks were precisely mixed into a 'golden' matrix, from which the Dolby Surround Decoder extracted four more or less distinct channels—Left (L), Right (R), Centre (L+R), and Surround (L-R). To these, the decoder then added its famed Dolby B noise reduction, as well as a standardised delay for the surround track. The result was a dazzling three-dimensional soundfield, achieved with sturdy and relatively inexpensive print material. A special optical stereo 'eye' was fitted to existing projection equipment, making the cost of Dolby conversion often less than $5,000, easily within the reach of most first-run houses.

Star Wars (1977) was the first Dolby optical stereo film given a wide release, and Twentieth Century-Fox immediately found that theatres equipped with Dolby Stereo reported significantly higher receipts than those without the process. Today, Dolby Stereo is virtually an index of audience attendance patterns, and all major features are produced in at least one Dolby format. Dolby's latest refinement, Lucasfilm THX 70mm 6-track, introduces 'Stereo Surround' for the first time into any 6-track mix. Aside from a brief experiment with 'Quintaphonic' sound for *Tommy*, theatrical stereo has always retained a single surround channel. THX Stereo Surround effectively 'steals' one of the centre boom tracks for a second discrete surround channel. This configuration was used to beef up the sound of *Top Gun* (1986) and *Star Trek IV* (1986), and no doubt signals the future standard for 70mm 6-track projection.

Given the glamour and novelty that has always attached to the film industry, it was not surprising that the much ballyhooed 'stereophonic' sound eventually found its way into the living room. Since its introduction in 1956, home stereo has thrived in its pursuit of a superior dynamic range. The consumer's love affair with his components has spawned ancillary markets, and laid the foundation for the development of the home video market. In 1975, the first videotape recorders were incapable of stereo reproduction. Simply to buy or rent a feature was considered novelty enough. When MCA and Philips introduced their laser optical disc as an alternative delivery system, they wisely exploited the format's stereo capability

by releasing films, whenever possible, in their complete stereo roadshow form. Within five years, the VCR market countered with Beta and VHS Hi-Fi, which fully matched the sound quality of pre-digital laserdiscs. And even before these units arrived, SSI Inc introduced the first Dolby Stereo Matrix Decoder designed specifically to recreate the theatrical stereo environment in the home.

In a remarkably short time, then, the consumer was able to achieve digital quality, Dolby Surround stereo within his homevideo system. Having acquired the hardware, he naturally demanded high-quality stereo versions of his favourite vintage films. Quick to spot this lucrative segment of the very competitive 'sell-through' market, the homevideo divisions at the major studios scrambled through their vaults to recover any and all stereo material that could economically be transferred to video. In many cases, what they found was a vintage stereo library that had severely disintegrated or, worse still, been intentionally destroyed.

It has been a full thirty years since the heyday of CinemaScope 4-track stereo, and the physical condition of the vast library of 4- and 6-track magnetic soundtrack masters varies predictably from studio to studio, and vault to vault. This is due largely to the storage policies of individual studios which, in turn, have been determined by the heavy financial burden of their overhead. As far back as the 1930s, in fact, the major studios were compelled to develop efficient, cost-effective systems of culling and maintaining their film libraries. Simply sorting the essential elements from their bulk is, in itself, a major task. Rick Chace, whose company, Chace Productions, uses the most advanced re-recording techniques to transfer and restore vintage soundtracks, clarifies this dilemma: 'By the time sound work alone was completed on the typical CinemaScope film, there would be perhaps 100 reels of stock sound footage. Add to these your picture internegative, your "flat" negative, your "Scope" negative, release prints, foreign prints . . . The various elements of a single film could fill a room, and there is only so much real estate in Los Angeles.'

In the 1950s, the two major markets were the first-run theatres and television, which often only required 16mm syndication prints. In most cases, the studios only kept the best, basic elements needed to strike new prints. Remaining release prints were stored separately from master negative material and were often melted down and recycled for whatever was currently in production. 'Nobody's a villain for getting rid of all this material,' Chace says. 'These films had earned their money and had moved on. If they had saved all this stuff, Los Angeles would be a vault.'

In the case of 4- and 6-track stereo soundtracks, the fullcoat magnetic master used to prepare release prints was stored in the sound department vaults in a controlled environment, while any remaining stereo prints were kept in circulation until they wore out. Once stored, these fullcoats were highly susceptible to shrinkage and the disintegration of their acetate base. In the 1950s, magnetic processes were relatively new, and no one was certain how long a magnetic master would survive. Today, experts know the optimum conditions for storage, but still are not clear why one 4-track will disintegrate entirely while another remains in near perfect condition.

Chace elaborates: 'We have sound elements in our studio that are totally ruined. We can only guess at what happened to them, but what it looks like in the case of these wonderful old 4-tracks is that they were literally stored in an oven. In the back of a mobile shipping container, perhaps, where the temperatures got up to 200 degrees every day for ten years. You get it in the studio, pull it out, and the magnetic oxide falls away. It's dust.' Even the hardier, well-preserved fullcoats will characteristically have a strong smell of vinegar, which is the result of their acetate composition oxidising into acetic acid. Once this process takes hold, the magnetic master becomes extremely delicate and hard to handle. It sheds a heavy dust which typically clogs the soundheads on remastering consoles. Sound technicians at MGM, in fact, often resort to dustmasks and goggles when handling this material for lengthy periods.

And yet, says Chace, 'When these 4-tracks are not damaged, they sound wonderful. There's no Dolby, no noise reduction. They were just very, very well recorded by the various sound departments. They were really on a creative roll in those days, and these tracks all sounded good. From *The Robe* on down to a Fabian movie.'

Careful storage of a 4-track master is one thing; its costly, time-consuming maintenance is another. There naturally came a point in the early 60s when the cost of maintenance outweighed its perceived value for some studios. As a result, many of the masters remained in storage, but were allowed to deteriorate unchecked. One factor behind this decision was the gradual demise of the CinemaScope 4-track stereo system in the theatre. By 1964, the process was largely obsolete in production, and fewer 70mm 6-tracks were being printed-down for 35mm 4-track release. As the delicate CinemaScope 'penthouse' soundheads wore out, they simply were not repaired or replaced. Eventually, only a very few theatres were able to project 4-track prints, and their equipment often destroyed the few stereo release prints in circulation. (Until recently, for example, *West Side Story* could only be heard in stereo in its video version, and at a handful of repertory theatres.)

Certain studios, however, have had a very clear appreciation of their libraries' potential value and have spared no expense in transferring and maintaining their 4- and 6-track masters. At Disney, for example, maintenance is nearly a religion, since the studio regularly re-releases its features every seven years to a new audience. Their careful attention to every element has resulted in a pristine library that includes the historic *Fantasia* tracks, as well as the magnetic masters for *Lady and the Tramp*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Mary*

Rouben Mamoulian's *Applause* (1929): a pioneering venture in 2-track sound.

Poppins. Fox, MGM and Columbia have also maintained the bulk of their stereo libraries, and Paramount has preserved the stereo masters for *The Ten Commandments*, *Paint Your Wagon* and the *Star Trek* television series.

Amazingly, however, Warners—the 'Pioneers of Sound Film'—erased their entire library of 4- and 6-track magnetic masters in the early 1960s. And because there are no known surviving stereo release prints made from these masters, the stereo for such classics as *House of Wax*, *East of Eden*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Giant*, *The Spirit of St Louis* and *Gypsy* is apparently lost forever. In fact, the only surviving stereo tracks for any pre-Dolby Warners films are those like *The Music Man*, *My Fair Lady* and *Cheyenne Autumn*, which were produced by independent companies that also stored their own negatives. Michael Finnegan, of Warners Homevideo Division, says that the size and scope of these erasures is not fully known by the present administration. 'Like many others, I have a general idea of what was produced in stereo, and what appears to have been lost. But as to why it was done, there are only rumours and legends.'

These rumours, from sources inside Warners, all go back to the financial status of the studio in the early 60s and to Jack Warner's penchant for saving money. Considering that these 4-tracks were obsolete by production standards, that there was no stereo television or Hi-Fi video in the foreseeable future, and most importantly that these magnetic fullcoats could be recycled, a decision was made to erase them in bulk. At the time, the last traces of these stereo films were the few surviving release prints which, today, are gone as well. Today, it's fashionable to condemn such false economies in film preservation. To many, Warners' decision was fully equivalent to RKO burning the *Citizen Kane* negative. 'You want to blame them,' says Chace. 'But it's hindsight blame.' Finnegan believes that as a result the industry is now generally aware that it must take care with the elements of a film, know where they are and preserve them.

This was certainly the attitude behind Warners' strong support for the 1984 reconstruction of *A Star Is Born*. Ron Haver, head of the Film Department of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, spent weeks rummaging through every Warner vault on both coasts for the lost master elements of *A Star Is Born*. Stereo was restored to the film only because years before Haver had pleaded with a Warner librarian to hide the last stereo release print. Even that print was severely worn, and painstaking efforts were required to restore the sound as far as possible to its original vitality. Haver's work on other films has taken him into a number of studio vaults, and he has found that 'studios have often refused to restore stereo to a film unless they have the magnetic *master* in their hands.' The logic behind this policy is often hard to define. 'In the case of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the story has always been that the fullcoat has deteriorated. And I keep telling them, "But you have a beautiful 4-track release print. Why not use that?"'

Fox pioneered the CinemaScope 4-track system, and so it is no surprise that that studio has been far ahead of the pack in its efforts to transfer and restore its stereo library. Rick Montez, who heads the Fox Film Services Division, explains: 'Our sound department makes every attempt to maintain and transfer these magnetic masters before they show any sign of deterioration. Many of these people have been around since the days when they actually did this work, and they naturally feel very strongly about preserving it.' Accordingly, 'We never master a title without doing it right the first time. We always go back and take the best original elements available. And this includes stereo.'

In the 1970s, Fox made it their policy when remastering stereo films to remix 4-tracks into a two-channel optical stereo print that was compatible with the Dolby Surround Matrix. The one-inch video masters, used for broadcast and homevideo transfers, are always a second generation from this newly mastered print, and always retain stereo information. As a result, Fox has a library full of re-mastered 4-track stereo films, and has spared itself the expense of a second stereo master for the Hi-Fi video market. Equally significant for many 'ambiphiles', the CinemaScope surround channel has been specially handled so that it may be easily extracted through the use of a Dolby Matrix Decoder.

Such attention to stereo detail was indeed ahead of its time, as the MGM/UA, Warners and Columbia Video Divisions are only now beginning to re-master their early video releases with stereo. 'At the time,' says Montez, 'the attitude was: "Two-track stereo? Who'll know, and who cares?" There was no market for it. But we knew that there would be, and by insisting on doing it right the first time, Fox saved itself a lot of money. We've also preserved the Fox product. In the event that anything happens to the original 4-track, we at least have the optical stereo version, which is a pretty good approximation of the original discrete magnetic master. We were ahead of our time, really. Waiting for our chance. Waiting for the moment. Now, that moment is here.'

The moment came about largely as the result of Hi-Fi video and MTS stereo television. 'The homevideo market is really driving the whole issue of stereo preservation,' says Chace. 'Picture quality has changed very little in the last ten years. In video, the real difference is sound.' Finnegan agrees: 'The market hasn't yet reached the point where stereo alone will sell a movie to a mass audience. But stereo is certainly an enhancement that many purchasers seek out.' As a result, the major video divisions are now beginning to see the value in restoring stereo from *any available source* at any reasonable cost. Reasonable, again, translates as cost-effective. 'You must apply the investment of restoring a damaged soundtrack against all future uses of the master,' explains Finnegan. 'Other markets, such as network or cable television, may elect to invest in the restored master, in which case the restored stereo would go along on those versions as well.'

Mamoulian's *Silk Stockings* (1957): the 'Stereophonic Sound' number.

Julie Harris in *East of Eden*: 'the stereo ... is apparently lost for ever.'

Stereo television has created an entirely new demand for stereo prints of older films that have otherwise lost their primetime value. Naturally, the higher syndication value of such prints has become another incentive and perhaps the best guarantee that the costs of restoration will be recouped. *Carousel*, a recent case in point, was the focus of an intense write-in campaign a few years back to have its 6-track stereo master restored. Fox generally responded that the costs would be greater than anticipated homevideo revenue. But with the advent of the new Fox Television network, and widespread MTS broadcasting into the bargain, Fox finally restored *Carousel* expressly for syndication with no video release anticipated for the immediate future. Other Fox titles, such as *The Robe*, *Anastasia*, *Demetrius and the Gladiators* and *Prince of Players*, are also being broadcast in stereo without prior video release.

Dick May, head of MGM's Film Services Division, sees another future development. 'We are beginning to retrieve stereo that was originally produced for films but, for whatever reason, was never released to the theatres. When we were preparing the homevideo release of *How the West Was Won*, the sound department found that it actually had more in its vaults than ever went out to the theatres. We were able to restore the film to its full stereo roadshow length, with Overture, Intermission and Walk Out Music. We've also located the stereo master for *Bad Day at Black Rock*, which never went out to the theatres in stereo.' This 'top-drawer' approach to video is also evident in MGM/UA's earlier releases of *Ben-Hur*, *Doctor Zhivago*, *Gone With the Wind* and *Raintree County*. Even more remarkable is MGM's recent discovery of the stereo music tracks prepared for *High Society* and the historic 1939 multi-mike recordings for *The Wizard of Oz*. These survive solely through the loving handling of studio personnel who felt that they should be preserved through the years. In the case of *High Society*, these tracks will be remixed into the video master for future video releases. Unfortunately, the tracks for *The Wizard of Oz* are merely artifacts. They were never intended to provide true stereo, and do not exist in any length or form that can be synched and mixed into the soundtrack. They have survived, though, as shining examples of studio sound preservation.

According to Rick Chace, these relatively recent developments have created a land-office business for his and other audio houses. 'Not only do we restore these old 4-tracks to the best possible quality, more and more studios are now coming to us to clean up their mono optical tracks as well. Nobody wants to play bad mono through their audio systems, and quite often, for older movies, studios only have the optical soundtrack negative, which is horribly noisy. We start out by providing the cleanest mono we can achieve with digital technology. And usually once they've heard this mono, they'll say "How about rechannelling this for stereo?"' Chace Productions is perhaps the leader in this field of stereo and mono restoration, and their 'Chace Surround' has enhanced the video releases of such films as *White Christmas*, *East of Eden*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant*. The company's work will soon be available on a spate of Warner Brothers titles, including *Bullitt* and *Dirty Harry*, and their contract with Ted Turner will provide synthetic stereo for the colorised versions of *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Sea Hawk*, *Captain Blood* and *Casablanca*. While purists will complain about the alteration of these films' black and white integrity, few will disapprove of the restoration of their deteriorating optical soundtracks.

In its preoccupation with the image, world cinema has generally given the aesthetic and techniques of film sound short shrift. Perhaps this is because few critics and historians writing on the feature industry have felt confident in the field. Like the most casual viewer, they trust in the anonymous wizards who routinely astound with spectacular offscreen effects. One thing is becoming clear, though. Today's hi-tech gadgetry is actually placing in the viewer's hand the ability to control what he could only witness ten years ago. This hands-on familiarity is again changing audience attendance patterns, and is breeding a new generation for whom the hardware and quality of presentation are more important than the films they watch. The future of sound preservation truly belongs to them, for their dollars have finally brought about the restoration and recirculation of a vital segment of Hollywood's finest product. ■

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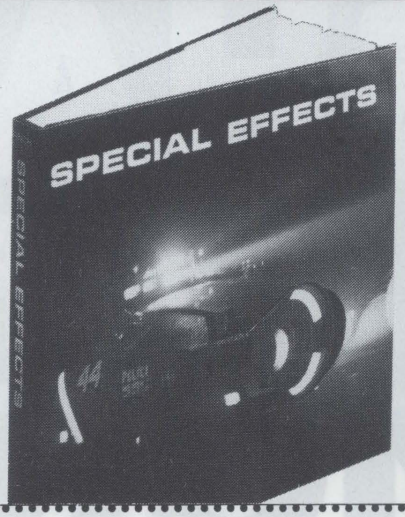

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JOHN BELTON

THE SHAPE OF MONEY

Thanks to the concerted efforts of the Directors Guild, the American Society of Cinematographers, the Screen Actors Guild, the Writers Guild of America, the American Film Institute and others, the problem of colorisation has received national attention in the United States, culminating in a Congressional Hearing in May 1987 at which Woody Allen, Milos Forman, John Huston and Sydney Pollack spoke out on behalf of creative rights for film artists. But although colorisation provides a highly visible, focused issue for debate, touching as it does upon points of law and copyright, it is not the only issue.

In fact, it is merely a drop in the bucket when it comes to the area of creative rights, as the recent contract negotiations between the DGA and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers dramatically illustrate. The DGA Creative Rights Committee, headed by director Elliot Silverstein, sought changes in the basic contract for directors 'to prohibit any material alteration of a motion picture after delivery of the answer print.' Material alterations include 'colouring, time compression and expansion, panning and scanning, and change to allow exhibition in 3-D.' Unfortunately, the settlement of the contract dispute last July resulted in the tabling of those demands

Composing for CinemaScope: James Mason, Barbara Rush and Chris Olsen in Nicholas Ray's *Bigger Than Life*.

before they could be fully negotiated.

Though the US Copyright Office has decided to grant copyright protection to certain colorised films, thus acknowledging the legal rights of producers to do whatever they want with their 'property', film-makers continue to wage a moral battle against the alteration of their work, a battle that extends beyond the high-profile issue of colorisation. Many directors and cinematographers, for example, point out that the practice of panning and scanning is as bad or worse.

Panning and scanning involves the rephotographing of oblong-shaped CinemaScope and widescreen films in order to make them fit the more or less squarish shape of the television screen. Colorisation is an addition to the image, and whatever is added can also be subtracted; a twist of the colour-control dial on TV sets equipped with such a feature can restore the black and white of the original image. (Many new sets do not have colour-control dials.) But panning and scanning, which effectively chops off fifty per cent of the original image, is an irreversibly negative phenomenon; it subtracts image that can never be restored.

Milos Forman contends that absolutely no changes should be made in a film without the director's consent. This would include colorisation, editing for television and cropping widescreen films so that they fit into the narrow-screen television format. 'Until there is legislation which forbids any alteration of a film without the director's approval and supervision,' argues Forman, 'broadcasters ought to let the audience know what they're seeing on TV. They should tell them that the film has been altered and in what way it has been altered, and the person who did it should receive a separate credit. It borders on consumer fraud if a film has been altered and is still being advertised as "a Woody Allen film" or "a Warren Beatty film".'

Though most films that have been colorised or edited do contain a credit or a caveat, such as the vague 'Edited for Television' subtitle which encompasses everything from censorship cuts to compression or (in the recent case of *Rear Window* to which a three-minute dream sequence was *added*) expansion to fill a time slot, no film has ever had a title announcing that it has been 'Recomposed for Television', though virtually every film made since 1954 is, in fact, recomposed for television. For cinematographer Nestor Almendros, 'panning and scanning is much worse than colorisation.' Even though Almendros believes that good composition can survive almost anything and that even a fragment can convey composition, what we see on television is only an approximation of the original.

Forman likens television panning and scanning to 'the owner of an art gallery who decides to cut a painting so that it might better accommodate the space of his gallery.' Bruce Goldstein, whose nine-week series of American, European and Japanese films in 'scope sold out the house almost every night at New York's Film Forum last spring, used the series to make a polemical point about the panning and scanning of films on video, arguing that 'virtually all the artistry that goes into the making of a film—cinematography, editing, direction and even acting—is totally destroyed by panning and scanning, leaving only the bare bones of a story.'

Director Martin Scorsese, whose concern about colour fading led him to shoot *Raging Bull* in black and white, says that panning and scanning is one of the reasons he has never shot a film in 'scope. 'I've been obsessed with 'scope for years and would love to shoot everything in 'scope,' he explains, 'but I realise that when it's shown on TV the power of the picture will be completely lost.'

Film-makers like Scorsese know that today their work will be seen by more people on TV than in the theatre. Statistics indicate that only 10 per cent of a film's total audience views it in the theatre, that another 20 per cent will see it on videotape or cable and that 70 per cent will see it on broadcast television. Armed with this knowledge, directors can, like Scorsese with *The King of Comedy*, consciously design a film with television in mind. Or, like Almendros, they can try to 'protect' themselves for TV. 'I try to take the TV image into consideration,' says Almendros. 'I don't allow myself to make extreme compositions, and I try to keep what is important in the centre of the frame. Today every camera viewfinder has a dotted line marking out the TV frame area, and many directors of photography use it so that something of their original composition will come across on TV.'

For Scorsese, films made during the past twenty years are not as badly damaged by panning and scanning as are films like Nicholas Ray's *Bigger Than Life*, which was made in what Scorsese refers to as 'the high 'scope' era. 'Directors today,' he contends, 'avoid the extravagances of composition and framing you find in 1950s 'scope films.' Joseph Biroc, who shot a number of 50s CinemaScope classics including Sam Fuller's *China Gate* and *Forty Guns*, agrees, noting that in current widescreen productions, because of the television factor, there's less attention paid to composition than there used to be.

Given these contemporary tendencies to compose with television in mind, the issue of panning and scanning has become more insidious, because it is harder for viewers to detect, and the industry, in order to protect films for possible television distribution, has become grudgingly complicit in this deception. At the same time, pan and scan technology has become more and more sophisticated over the years and thus harder to detect. Primitive pan and scan techniques involved simply rephotographing the centre portion of the original image, lopping off both sides. Single, fixed-position scanning often resulted in unintentional avant-garde minimalism in films that exploited the extreme edges of the frame. As David Parker of the Library of Congress points out, 'in a conversation between John Wayne and Robert Stack in *The High and the Mighty*, all you can see on television is the empty space of the cockpit between them.'

By the early 1960s, major improvements were introduced, permitting from seven to twelve different positions from which the original 'scope image could be viewed by a scanning telecine device. M. Peter Keane, who developed a seven-position pan and scan system for Screen Gems in 1961, explains that 'you could now cut from position to position during a dialogue sequence in order to keep whoever is speaking in frame and occasionally get a reaction shot of whoever is listening.' Earlier that same year, Alex Alden devised a similar system for Fox using twelve positions, which his tests concluded to be the minimum number necessary in order to cover the action adequately. Today, there are virtually an infinite number of possible positions, as well as new technologies which make optically introduced panning movements virtually indistinguishable from actual camera pans.

Even though panning and scanning technology is better, panned and scanned films have not necessarily improved in quality. Ralph Martin, a former editor who supervises panning and scanning for Warner Brothers, complains that many films today are panned and scanned 'on the fly' by a camera operator in a laboratory who may pan and scan a two-hour film in as little as two and a half hours of real time. 'It's better if it's done shot by shot by an experienced cameraman or film editor like we do here at Warners,' says Martin. Pete Comandini of YCM labs worked on the first film-to-video transfer back in 1969 (the film was *The Big Country*, which was shot in Vistarama) and says that they spent almost six months working on this single transfer, though today from six to twelve hours might be spent on average in panning and scanning a feature film.

Keane, now director of tape quality at HBO, insists on shot by shot panning and scanning and cut by cut colour correction, which he does in-house at a cost of from $6,000 to $8,000 per feature film. (It costs about twice as much if the work is sent out to a Hollywood lab.)

Martin says that the goal of the best panning and scanning is 'to try to preserve what the director did with the original film and to try to make it look its best.' But the dominant conventions of the pan and scan industry seem to be relatively simple—keep whoever is speaking in frame and try to be as unobtrusive as possible.

***The High and the Mighty*: John Wayne, Robert Stack. On television, all you see is the cockpit between them.**

In the best of all possible worlds, there would be no panning and scanning, but in the marketplace realities of our world, the practice would seem to be a necessary evil, the only way we can see films on TV. But though the best of all possible worlds may not be here, it certainly seems to be somewhere else. Italian television, for example, shows 'scope and widescreen movies with hard masking above and below the image in order to preserve the aspect ratio of the original work. If *The Robe* can be shown in CinemaScope on TV in Rome for Easter, why can't it be shown that way in the United States?

One of the great myths surrounding the pan and scan issue in the United States is that panning and scanning is the law, that Federal Communications Commission regulations prohibit the showing of films in what is known as the letterbox format—that is, with black masking above and below the image. But as John Reisner of the Policy and Rules Division of the FCC points out, there is no such regulation: 'About three years ago, there was a rule, which has since been dropped, regulating the use of defective broadcast equipment that results in image shrinkage, with no picture on the top, bottom and sides. Though someone might possibly confuse this with the deliberate masking of films for aesthetic reasons, letterboxing is an optical not an electronic matter and therefore not a concern of the FCC.' As Alex Alden explains, 'The networks refused to show films with hard masking; they wanted the image to fill the frame.'

Rick Altman, director of the Project for International Communication Studies at Iowa, attributes the difference between American and some European broadcast conventions to larger cultural concerns. 'American audiences,' he finds, 'have been trained by Hollywood to view films largely in terms of plot, character and overall narrative. Europeans are frequently more concerned with aesthetic elements. They're taught to look at images from a perspective that is influenced by the traditions of art history.'

Of course, many Americans share these concerns, and there is a market for letterboxed films on videotape and TV. But letterboxing seems reserved largely for product which might be loosely termed 'art cinema'. A letterboxed version of Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* is now available on tape, and Criterion distributes Max Ophuls' *Lola Montès* in 'scope on laser disc, while Embassy Home Video has come out with a letterboxed version of the film on tape. Criterion's Jonathan Turell, who also offers Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* on disc in 'scope and has just released *The Graduate* and *Blade Runner* in this format, points out that 'for widescreen films, the letterbox format is closer to what the film was like in its original theatrical presentation.' In the highly competitive video distribution market, Criterion has come up with a product that Turell feels 'is not merely different from the rest but better because of its fidelity to the original.'

While a director like Woody Allen has been able to negotiate a contract that enables him to control the video releases of his films, resulting in the letterboxed release of *Manhattan* in 1985, few other directors have the sort of audience that Allen has, an audience which is sufficiently imbued with art cinema sophistication to appreciate the widescreen format on tape. It's unlikely that audiences for *Star Wars*, *Rocky* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* would put up with letterboxing. Indeed, in the May 1987 issue of *Video Review*, TV critic Jeffrey Lyons objected to a letterboxed review copy of John Hughes' *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, claiming that 'for me, letterboxing is the worst desecration of a movie this side of colorisation.' Paramount, the distributor of *Ferris Bueller*, has objected to Lyons' review, asserting that the film was never intended for release in the letterbox format. Indeed, they released the film only in a panned and scanned version.

The debate over panning and scanning versus letterboxing remains thorny. Lyons maintains that with letterboxing, 'you end up seeing *less*,' because everything is reduced in size.

David Parker sees the problem in rather concrete, Swiftian terms: 'Who cares about anybody three inches high?' Scorsese insists that though letterboxing does look a bit odd on small TV sets, 'scope films on tape or disc look quite good on large 40-inch sets. But what is most important for Scorsese is that letterboxing 'makes you aware of composition and of the work that has been put into every shot.'

For Woody Allen and others who want their films to be seen properly, and for those who care about how our cinema past is transmitted to the present, letterboxing serves both as a symbolic gesture in defiance of panning and scanning and as a device educating viewers to the tremendous differences between film and television formats, differences which seriously compromise the artistic integrity of films on video. But it is a gesture that is unlikely to triumph over the economic imperatives that shape the film industry; what we see on TV is the shape that money produces.

Money drives the motion picture industry. Though it is undoubtedly one of film history's greatest ironies, it is none the less also entirely logical, given the profit motive, that Twentieth Century-Fox, which won an Oscar for introducing CinemaScope in 1953, thus providing the industry with something you couldn't get on TV, should win another Oscar in 1961 for developing a pan and scan system making it possible to show CinemaScope films on TV.

In the opening sequence of MGM's *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955), three war buddies who have just been discharged from the army bid farewell to one another at a New York bar, vowing to meet again at that same bar ten years from that day. To remind his pals of the date they are to meet, the character played by Gene Kelly tears a dollar bill into three equal sections, writes the date of their proposed reunion on them, and gives one to each of his friends.

Ten years later, during their reunion, the three former friends dance side by side, but in different locales. In a split-screen effect that playfully parodies the three-screen process of Cinerama, Kelly, Dan Dailey and Michael Kidd synchronise their movements to the music of 'Once Upon a Time', each dancer serving, as it were, as an integral third of a widescreen composition that is torn like the dollar bill each man carries in his wallet.

Filmed in CinemaScope, *It's Always Fair Weather* dramatically calls attention, through the uncanny resemblance between the devices of the split screen and the tripartite dollar bill, to a remarkable fact. By a strange coincidence, American currency is almost exactly the same shape as CinemaScope; both have an approximate ratio of width to height of 2.35 to 1. If it's permissible to indulge in a bit of what Orson Welles once called 'dollar-book Freud', I might suggest that perhaps the film industry which so readily embraced 'scope in the early 1950s unconsciously identified it with the big bucks they hoped to generate with it at the box office.

But an aesthetic born out of dreams of profit has nightmarish consequences when subjected to the irreconcilably different medium of television. When *It's Always Fair Weather* is shown on TV, the original CinemaScope buck loses its bang. The dollar is torn in half, not in thirds; but this time there are no pieces left over out of which the original can be restored; the severed half simply disappears. We see Gene Kelly dancing with the dismembered limbs of Dan Dailey and Michael Kidd, whose faces and torsos are now cropped from the original image so that the dance number can be squeezed into the narrower aspect ratio of the television frame. This is the shape of television. And it gives you an image that's almost as worthless in terms of the original as that half dollar bill.

For over twenty-five years TV has short-changed the American public when it has shown CinemaScope and widescreen films and has done so without telling us about it. 'Film is such a fragile art form,' warns Scorsese, 'and a film can easily be hurt or even destroyed if we're not careful.' Panning and scanning is a genuine threat to the aesthetic integrity of the cinema. The furore over colorisation might just provide us with the opportunity to inform the public about it and to begin to make up for our negligence in the past, which has allowed it to go unchallenged for so long. ■

LEXICONNING

Colorisation, panning and scanning, cutting and editing for television, bleeped out sound, and now 'Lexiconning'. For this latest example of how television treats cinema films, we are indebted to a letter sent by a Miami attorney, Donald L. Pevsner, to Elliot Silverstein, Chairman of the Directors Guild of America, quoted here in extract with Mr Pevsner's permission:

'I would like to relate the way in which I accidentally discovered the so-called "Lexicon" time-compression process in America's television industry.

'During the summer of 1985, WCIX-TV (Channel 6 in Miami) telecast the classic movie *Casablanca*. As the owner of a VCR, I decided to tape it for home use, off the air. And, as I wanted an unfettered movie, I stayed in front of my TV set to edit out the commercials. Well over an hour into the film, I discovered that a key scene was missing: the famous scene in which Ingrid Bergman draws a gun on Humphrey Bogart to get the vital "letters of transit". Having, in essence, wasted over an hour of my time on a gutted film, I nevertheless continued to tape the remainder . . . on the theory that a chopped-up film was still better than having none at all in my closet. There I placed the finished tape, where it remained, unviewed, for a year.

'In summer 1986, Channel 6 again scheduled *Casablanca* . . . This time around, I decided to call Channel 6 ahead of time, to see whether they had mutilitated the film a second time around. I telephoned directly to the engineering department, where the answer I received was: "The film hasn't been edited, but it's been Lexiconned." Not understanding the meaning of "Lexiconned", I went ahead and taped this movie showing over the previous year's tape entry. When I was finished, having seen a film with the missing Bergman/Bogart scene restored, I proceeded to log the tape-counter numbers. And—surprise!—I found at least 5-6 minutes of leftover tape from the previous year. The *uncut* movie had run 5-6 minutes less than the edited version. What was going on?

'The answer: a Lexicon Time Compressor, manufactured by the Lexicon Corporation of Waltham, Massachusetts, was used to speed up *Casablanca* artificially. By doing this, WCIX-TV gained a full twelve minutes in a 120-minute time slot, using a 10 per cent speed-up adjustment on its machine, which "found" twelve minutes was used to cram in extra commercials, over and above an already abundant number.

'Hundreds of Lexicon devices have been sold to television broadcasting stations all across the United States. Independent stations are the prime customers, but it is probable that network-owned affiliates (and probably the networks themselves) own these devices as well. Additionally, film packaging firms supplying the television broadcasting industry may own such devices, supplying pre-speeded-up product to individual stations. Lexicons have been in use at least since 1983, when Tom Shales wrote the first known newspaper column about them for the *Washington Post*. I estimate that at least 1,000 such machines are in use today in the US—

with "new improved models" on the way.

'When I looked again at the "Lexiconned" version of *Casablanca*, it was painfully obvious—given my secret information about the practice—that something was indeed "wrong" with the film. Figures moved jerkily and too quickly; raindrops fell as if each drop had a little lead weight attached to it. And 350-pound Sydney Greenstreet virtually levitated out of his chair . . . I found, with "20-20 hindsight", that the viewing of such speeded-up "Lexiconned" films produced a feeling of actual physical tension in several viewers, including me . . . and this factor alone surely warrants a formal investigation by the appropriate legislative and regulatory bodies.

'But the sneaky, surreptitious deceit of the entire US television viewing public by the enormously wealthy television broadcasting industry is the principal matter that demands equitable resolution. Clearly, the stations involved would most probably never "Lexicon" their film showings if the public was on proper notice of the practice. As with the famous case of subliminal advertising, declared deceptive and unlawful by a unanimous Federal Communications Commission in 1974 on the grounds of *inherent deception*, the practice can only continue in the presence of total viewer ignorance . . . The public cannot discover speeded-up films on their own by such giveaways as voice tracks which sound like "Alvin and the Chipmunks", because this insidious marvel and perversion of technology possesses a special circuit that leaves voice-pitch normal while speeding up the visual image . . .'

Mr Pevsner goes on to explain that in July 1986 he filed a formal Petition for Rulemaking with the Federal Communications Commission, asking it to outlaw the use of 'Lexicon-type devices' by 'all television broadcasting licensees', or alternatively to forbid the use of such devices 'unless a continuous, clearly explained and prominent symbol is superimposed on the screen during all times such devices are in use.' In November 1986, James McKinney, chief of the Mass Media Bureau of the FCC, dismissed the petition.

Since then, Mr Pevsner has returned to the attack with the FCC, as well as urging the Directors Guild of America to issue press releases on the subject and to ask the FCC for public hearings. 'I cannot imagine another country, anywhere in the world, that would permit (or justify) "Lexiconning" to occur at all,' adds Mr Pevsner. We hope he's right. There is no evidence, certainly, that any British television company is using the Lexicon Time Compressor (itself an innocent device) to speed up films for television. Incidentally, British television regularly shows films at 25 fps; in America, with its different system, the standard, as in cinemas, is 24 fps. ■

ATTENBIKO

The political implications of *Cry Freedom*

Anthony Sampson

Any major feature film about South Africa would have wide political repercussions at this stage of international concern with apartheid: and the impact can be all the stronger since Pretoria has effectively censored television coverage of the black resistance over the last two years. During the first South African emergency in 1985 the filming of police raids and brutality in the black townships, shown on TV screens round the world, did much to arouse western indignation and the clamour for sanctions and boycotts. Now these scenes have almost disappeared from television, and even the press provides very few reports from inside the townships.

The Pretoria government is more successful in suppressing the bad news than most viewers realise, through intimidation which leads to self-censorship. The American TV networks *do* receive smuggled film from inside the townships, but prefer not to show it, lest their own correspondents are expelled from the country. And foreign correspondents can easily fall into the same kind of trap as those in Nazi Germany in the 1930s, who became largely dependent on official sources without wishing to admit it.

A feature film offers a different kind of opportunity. It cannot show actual contemporary footage of events, but it can show what life is really like for black South Africans and their leaders. The story of Steve Biko, the black hero of *Cry Freedom*, who founded and led the 'black consciousness' movement and who was tortured to death in jail ten years ago, remains intensely relevant to contemporary South Africa; and it can provide a sharp focus for life in the black townships.

But to make this story appeal to mass western audiences involved an inevitable political compromise—at least as the producer/director Sir Richard Attenborough saw it. It seems to be almost a Hollywood axiom that an American audience watching any film about a remote country needs to identify with a white hero—like, for instance, the *New York Times* correspondent in *The Killing Fields*. And Attenborough chose to show the Biko story through the involvement of Donald Woods, the outspoken white South African editor who championed Biko and then escaped from the country to stir up western opinion.

But how could Woods become the chief protagonist without appearing to diminish the role of Biko himself—a hero and martyr on a far greater scale, as Woods would be the first to acknowledge—thus antagonising the present black political leaders?

It is all the more sensitive because of the recurring complaints of black South Africans about the white liberals, during each past emergency: that they talk much about their own principles, but when the going gets tough they can always quit the country, leaving the blacks to face detention, torture or murder. Biko himself, who began his political movement by breaking away from white liberal students, was always insistent that blacks must fight their own battles to the end, without relying on white friends for support.

Perhaps the contradiction is inevitable, for anyone who wants to be both serious and popular about South Africa. A western audience needs its white hero to identify with: but the real heroes are either black, or one of those wholly committed white martyrs to the black cause, like Bram Fischer or Ruth First, whose communist allegiances would put off American audiences.

Could the contradiction ever be resolved? Many people concerned with South African politics, including myself,

OROUGH'S

The shantytown at Crossroads.

thought not. Attenborough's basic solution is to make it clear from the start that this is *not* a film about Biko; it is a film about Donald Woods and his view of his country, depicting Biko's tragedy through his eyes, and culminating not in Biko's murder but in Woods' escape. He uses this central narrative to provide a background of police atrocities, both against Biko and against blacks in general, with set-pieces at the beginning and at the end of the film.

In many respects it works better than I could have imagined. From the beginning, Kevin Kline shows Donald Woods as a newspaper editor with an engaging home-town simplicity, with a suburban family life with his wife Wendy and five children which could be in California if it were not for the black servants. Woods encounters Biko, argues and jokes with him, and is introduced to the world of the black townships, with a humour and scepticism which avoids sentimentality.

Kline can movingly convey Woods' own predicament as his loyalty to Biko begins to impinge on his white domestic peace, and the state begins to move against him. Woods visits the Minister of Justice to complain about police brutality, only to find the police turning on him. We share his quiet sense of fear as if he were the man next door.

Biko himself, impressively played by the American Denzel Washington with a convincing black South African accent, remains the secondary hero, emerging periodically from the shadows, intruding into the newspaper office and suburban home. His own domestic life, between his wife and girlfriend, never comes into the forefront. His political magnetism and his philosophy—which had great historical importance—never really comes alive. His tormenting, torture and murder are treated relatively briefly. And the extraordinary inquest into his death in which the police were compelled to describe their own brutality—which in itself provided the script for a successful play—is not covered.

But the portrayal of Biko, as far as it goes, seems to me accurate: particularly his remarkable ability to meet everyone on his own terms, to articulate and press home the central idea of black self-respect and self-assertion. He and the other chief black characters—including Mapetla played by John Matshikiza and Father Kani played by Zakes Mokae—are depicted with a conviction and dignity very different (for instance) from the lightweight portrayal of Mandela in the recent television drama.

The emphasis on Woods flows naturally from the film's opening assumptions; that this is a story seen through white eyes. To white South Africans, after all, Biko was someone who belonged to a quite separate world on the edge of their lives; and their lack of interest in Biko before his death is reflected in the lack of any known film footage about him.

It is only after Biko's death, less than halfway through the film, that the emphasis on the white liberal view becomes more worrying—at least to this viewer. Donald Woods' own ordeals—his harassment by the police, his banning, his children's tee-shirts soaked in acid—may carry more sympathy and dread because they are set against an ordinary suburban background, complete with dog and granny. But the domesticity begins to verge on sentimentality: all the more markedly after the unsentimental treatment of Biko, whose assertive philosophy was opposed to any self-dramatisation or self-pity.

The scenes of Woods' suburban home life seem part of a quite different drama. Of course that is what white South Africa is like: the comfortable suburbs are so thoroughly insulated, with the kind of ordinariness which no conventional news documentary can convey, that black politics and leaders remain as distant—even to liberals—as if they

were in another country. The film accurately conveys that. But the dramatic difficulty remains: for the memory of Biko, with his mangled tortured body, still lingers in the viewer's mind.

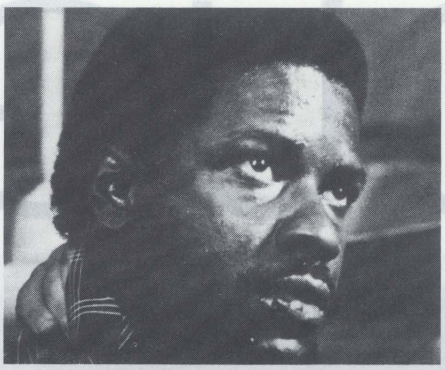
The long-drawn-out story of Woods' escape across the border—deliberately prolonged with picaresque incidents, flashbacks and false alarms—inevitably forces back the question. Can the escape of a white man, however brave, whose life is never seriously in danger, really be given so much importance compared to the murder of a major black leader whose courage was almost unimaginable? Attenborough brings an epic grandeur to the final escape, culminating with the small plane flying the Woods family into freedom against some dazzling scenic views. But the more triumphant the escape, the more it raises the question: what about the people left behind?

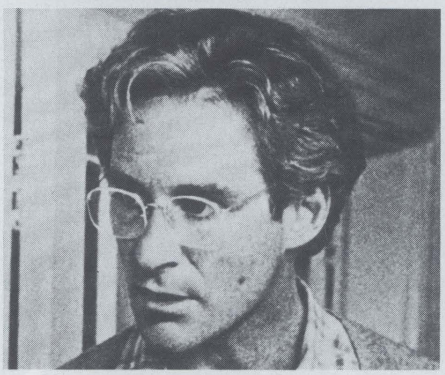
It is not that Woods was wrong to get out: as a writer, lecturer and propagandist he did far more to influence opinion against apartheid, particularly in America, than he could have done as a banned journalist in South Africa. It is that the climax of the escape inevitably carries the viewer, together with Woods, away from the heart of the problem.

Attenborough can partly offset the escape by following it with a vivid flashback to the Soweto uprising in 1976—the uprising which was inspired by Biko's ideas and which preceded his death. And the film ends with great dignity with the death-roll of all the black prisoners who have died in detention, accompanied by a moving song about the black townships and heroes. But the viewer, like Woods, has now left the country.

Both Attenborough and Woods (who was adviser to the film) knew they were entering a political battleground on which they were vulnerable to attack from all sides. Biko is a much-guarded name, and rival black groups have long been competing as the true inheritors of his tradition. The most radical of them, the socialist party Azapo, have been quick to complain that the film falsifies Biko's Black Consciousness movement by suggesting that South Africa belongs to everyone—not just to blacks; while the Pan African Congress—from which Biko drew some of his inspiration—resents any links between Biko and its larger rival, the African National Congress—which (with important exceptions, including Winnie Mandela) stood aloof from Biko's Black Consciousness at the time.

But in the decade since his death Biko has become a universal martyr and hero who has been taken into the ANC mythology. Many of the younger generation of black students, who were inspired by Biko and took part in the Soweto uprising, later turned to the ANC and its military wing Umkhonto. The ANC president Oliver Tambo took pains to welcome the followers of Biko's Black Consciousness, even though he and his





Denzel Washington (Steve Biko); Kevin Kline (Donald Woods).

executive were committed to multiracialism: and the ANC benefited enormously from this infusion.

Attenborough dutifully consulted the ANC; Tambo's son Dali acted as an adviser; and photographs of Mandela and ANC songs crop up in the film. Many blacks will undoubtedly continue to protest about the Biko story being told through white eyes: but the ANC leaders to whom I have talked are sophisticated enough to understand the problems of reaching a mass audience, and to welcome any opportunity to get western, particularly American, opinion to understand the horrors of apartheid.

As for the South African government, they will certainly do their best to rubbish the film, to claim that Donald Woods was in no danger, or that they were only too glad to see troublemakers leave the country. But they know that Biko's murder was the most serious single setback to the credibility of their policies abroad; and Attenborough's film will be a most unwelcome reminder of the state violence that lies behind apartheid, just at a time when they have been trying once again to recover their respectability in the West.

The film will anyway be banned inside South Africa, and its crucial impact will be abroad. In terms of political influence, what matters is the final impression it leaves on American and European viewers about the South African crisis—and what can be done about it.

It can certainly help to revive the flagging interest in South Africa, particularly in America where the concern has been exasperatingly fitful. Americans became intensely absorbed with South Africa in early 1985 and gave many black activists the impression that they would support them to the end; but after June 1986, when Pretoria clamped down on the black leaders and imposed censorship, Americans began to lose interest and became preoccupied with the Middle East and Central America instead. Many black South Africans are bitter that the Americans, having disinvested both financially and emotionally, are now walking away from their problem.

Cry Freedom, with its vivid images of police brutality and corruption, can help to revive serious concern. Though its story is ten years old, Biko's basic argument that apartheid is based on violence remains still more valid today; and his killing was proof of it. The opening sequence of the destruction of the shacktown at Crossroads, and the concluding sequence of the shooting of schoolchildren at Soweto, remain powerful reminders of the fundamental background of violence and the lack of human rights—which has no real parallel in the American history of the civil rights movement.

But there is also a danger that the climax of *Cry Freedom*, the escape of Donald Woods, could encourage western viewers to believe that the crisis is now hopeless; that there is nothing more that either white liberals or western governments can achieve in the face of such a brutal confrontation; that they must simply wait for the bloodbath.

It is certainly a fatal misconception. The western governments will be unable to evade the next stage of the South African civil war, however much they may wish to: both because its horrors will repercuss through domestic politics in the West; but also because the civil war will increasingly spill over into neighbouring states, as it is already spilling into Mozambique and Zimbabwe, compelling western involvement.

The one personification of the West in *Cry Freedom* is the Acting British High Commissioner in Lesotho, played by Alec McCowen, who receives Woods benignly and waves goodbye to his plane as it flies away to freedom, while ruefully accepting that South Africa is always able to invade its neighbours' territory. That attitude is typical enough of British attitudes both then and now. But it is a misleading message for the future. For there is little doubt that the frontline states bordering on the apartheid republic—including Lesotho even though it is surrounded—will increasingly become part of the civil war itself; and that Britain and America will inevitably be drawn into it, to provide much more active military and civilian aid to South Africa's opponents.

It was beyond the scope of *Cry Freedom* to show the international dimension. But to achieve serious political influence it will need not only to revive concern, but to be followed up with more positive publicity and campaigning to insist that Americans and Europeans cannot stay aloof from the crisis. It would be tragic if it left the message that freedom was only a cry. ■

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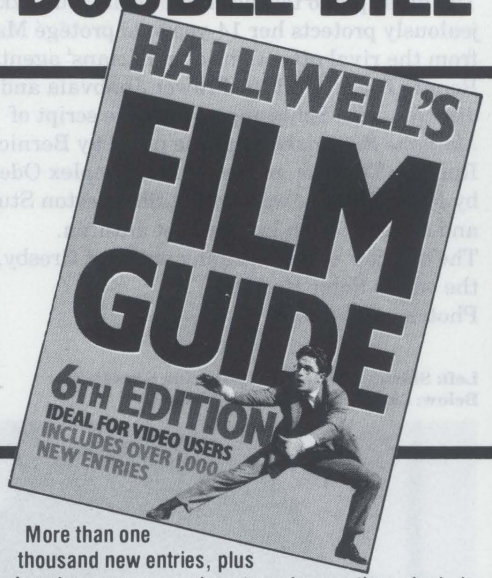

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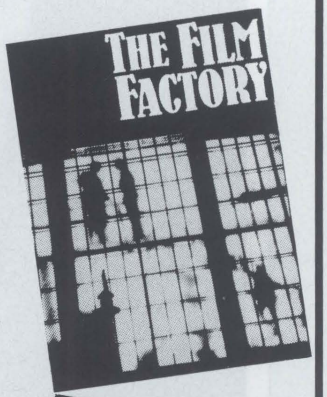

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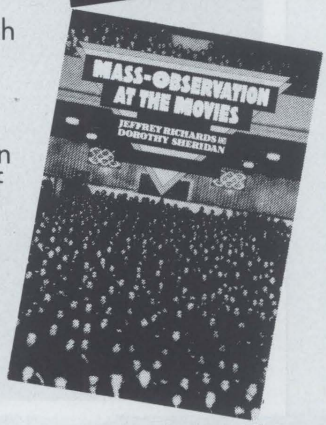

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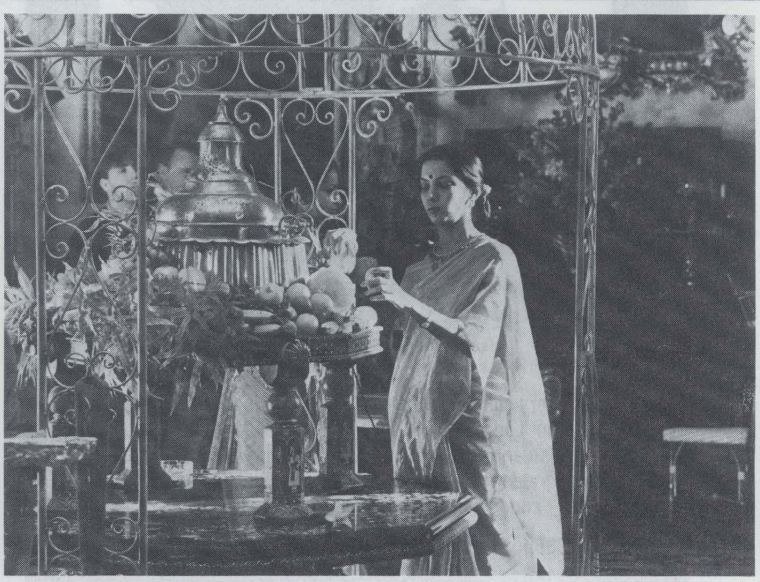
Madame Sousatzka

The great piano teacher Mme Irina Sousatzka jealously protects her 14-year-old protégé Manik from the rival attentions of musicians' agent Ronnie Blum . . . Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and the director John Schlesinger drew the script of *Madame Sousatzka* from the novel by Bernice Rubens. The film, produced for Cineplex Odeon by Robin Dalton, was shot at Shepperton Studios and on location in London last autumn.
The director of photography was Nat Crosby, the editor Peter Honess.
Photos: SIMON MEIN.

Left: Shirley MacLaine (Mme Irina Sousatzka).
Below: Jamila Massey (Mrs Ahuja).

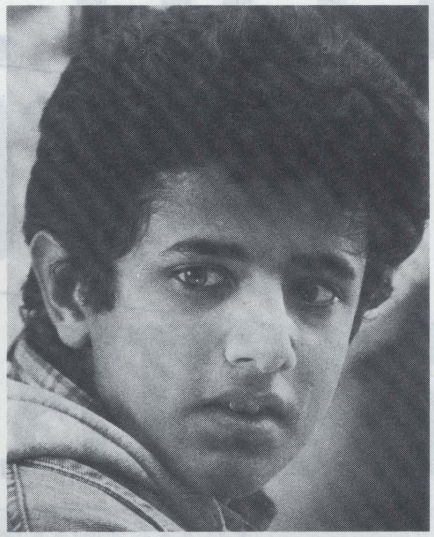
Peggy Ashcroft (Lady Emily, Mme Sousatzka's landlady), Geoffrey Blaydon (the osteopath lodger), Jeremy Sinden.

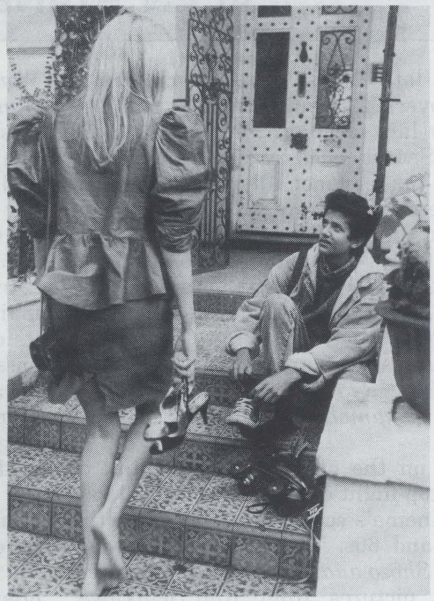


Shabana Azmi (Sushila, mother of Manik).

Left: Peggy Ashcroft (Lady Emily).

Below: Navin Chowdhry (the prodigy Manik) and Twiggy (Jenny, a singer).





Navin Chowdhry (Manik): a 14-year-old's pleasures.

Confederates and sweetmeats.

TOKYO'S NEW SATIRISTS

ALAN STANBROOK

In the late 1980s, Japanese cinema is rediscovering a vein of humour that has largely lain dormant for more than 50 years. Spearheaded by a new generation of film-makers, not all of them young, Japanese movies are putting the clock back to the time, before the war, when man's follies and foibles were regularly satirised in the cinema. Many of the classic titles of the time—Gosho's *The Neighbour's Wife and Mine*, Ozu's *I Was Born, But. . .*, Yamanaka's *Pot Worth a Million Ryo* and Mansaku Itami's *Kakita Akanishi*—were films of this kind.

Try, on the other hand, to think of many top-flight comedies from the Japanese cinema's second golden age in the 1950s and 60s. There's Shiro Toyoda's *A Cat, Shozo and Two Women* and a few quirky pictures from Kon Ichikawa. Otherwise, it's long faces and even longer running times all the way. Small wonder that the Japanese are thought to be a humourless lot and their movies depressing.

Now, however, all this is changing. Humour of all kinds—satire, black comedy, farce, comedy of character and of manners—has become the flavour of the decade. It's hard to say who thought of it first, but the breakthrough that set the trend in motion was probably Yoshimitsu Morita's 1983 film *Family Game*, which so tickled Tokyo's fancy that it swept the board at the annual Kinema Jumpo awards, the Japanese equivalent of the Oscars.

This was a seminal film in many ways. It starred the actor Juzo Itami (son of the 1930s director Mansaku Itami), who took such a liking to film as a medium that he gave up acting and turned instead to writing and directing for the cinema. The result: three brilliant satires in as many years (*The Funeral*, *Tampopo* and *A Taxing Woman*). At the same time, *Family Game* so irritated the scriptwriter Yoshinori Kobayashi, who regarded its analysis of Japanese family life as timid and facile, that he knocked out a scorching counterblast, eventually filmed by Sogo Ishii and known abroad as *Crazy Family*.

In *Family Game*, Morita has two main targets—the Japanese family and its obsession with exam-cramming as a passport to the good life of consumer durables and cholesterol-rich food. Morita's nuclear family—mum, dad, one bright son and one dunderhead—is introduced over the breakfast table and the character of each is sharply and economically sketched through the way he eats. Father, for example, slurps up his fried egg, careless of whom it might offend, while mother retreats into a fantasy world, where Romance still starts with a capital R. In their flat, there is no room and no privacy. Discussions about how to make junior less of a mooncalf have to be held in the back seat of the family car.

Enter a tutor hired to get him academically up to scratch. This he achieves by unconventional means, but in the process he comes to a clear understanding of the shortcomings of the system and of the hollowness of a family life led in this way. Morita finds a striking visual metaphor for the absence of communication within the family. He stages the climactic dinner scene (in which the tutor's patience finally snaps and he upends the table in disgust) like a travesty of the Last Supper, with the family ranged side by side in a line as in the Leonardo painting. No scope for conversation here.

Morita's movie is a mordant attack on the debasement of Japanese family life. It is a parody of what is left of the tradition into which Ozu's home dramas once fitted. But its strength is that the satirical shafts never slip into caricature. This awful, self-centred family, with its values awry, is all too believable so that when the tutor ultimately turns iconoclast and reduces the dinner table to pandemonium and a family ritual to a riot, the audience is entirely on his side. It's the best hatchet job on the bourgeoisie since Buñuel.

Not, though, in the eyes of the team that made *Crazy Family*. For them it's as spineless as *Kramer vs. Kramer* or *Ordinary People*. Yoshinori Kobayashi says, 'Sogo Ishii and I decided to make a more powerful and radical film on the same subject. We wanted to make a film about the nuclear family that would be both fun and poisonous as hell, an ultimate tragi-comedy that would be full of jokes.' The original Japanese title translates as *The Back-Jet Family*—a reference to a landing technique used in modern aviation that can be extremely dangerous if misapplied. In 1983, a Japan Air Lines pilot in a mental aberration ditched his plane in Tokyo harbour through misuse of this technique. Since then, the phrase has become synonymous with irrational behaviour.

The family in the movie, however, is not so much irrational as completely deranged. At the start they all move into a new suburban residence and by the end have reduced it to rubble in a bid to destroy the hordes of white ants that father believes are burrowing under his property. Meanwhile, grandfather dons his wartime uniform, proclaims martial law and lusts after his granddaughter, son skewers his thigh with a dart to help him stay awake, mother turns into a nymphomaniac and father pursues the whole family with a chainsaw and lights gasoline in the basement to keep the insects at bay.

The built-in limitation of such a scenario is very apparent. A family that certifiable is by definition abnormal and is not representative of anything. Where Morita in *Family Game* pillories the middle class by subjecting it to the unclouded gaze of an outsider, Sogo Ishii and Yoshinori Kobayashi in *Crazy Family* depict an untypical family entirely through its own eyes. All perspective is lost. As a satire, *Crazy Family* shoots itself in the foot, and there is not enough grace in Sogo Ishii's direction or wit in Kobayashi's script to make the picture work as a nonsense comedy in its own right.

For a movie steeped in vinegar, look instead to the deceptively named *Comic Magazine* of Yojiro Takita, written by and starring the pop-singer Yuya Uchida as the most repugnant gutter-press journalist since Kirk Douglas' Chuck Tatum in *Ace in the Hole*. Comic magazines, Japanese-style, are scandal sheets that specialise in bad taste. *Comic Magazine* draws on a representative selection of the real-life sensations that made the headlines in such publications during 1985. They culminate in the brutal murder of a commodity fraudster, which was avidly photographed by newspaper and television cameramen,

none of whom saw fit to intervene and stop the slaughter.

This world is depicted, as in *La Dolce Vita*, through the life and sleazy times of a successful smut-chaser. His assignments include gate-crashing the funeral of a murdered girl to ask her grieving parents whether they knew she was a prostitute, posing as a gigolo, acting in a pornographic picture, bugging bedrooms and interviewing criminals. In one of the film's most dramatic scoops, he beards a real-life murder suspect in a bar and attempts to get the lowdown on how he butchered the missus.

The corrosive power of the film lies in the fact that it holds up a mirror not only to Japanese society but to the audience as well. We are as spellbound as we are appalled by what we see. Yojiro Takita, barely into his thirties and with a previous career on the fringe of mainstream cinema, does not yet have the experience to carry off all his effects. There's a recurrent and pretentious motif involving a baseball pitch that outstays its welcome long before the final payoff, when the reporter hurls his microphone at the audience in lieu of the ball. And the tone falters in the closing scene, when he undergoes a somewhat improbable crisis of conscience and rushes to the rescue of the man being murdered. Nobody did so in reality and neither, on the evidence, would he. It's a disappointing finale to a film that otherwise has the authentic whiff of acid.

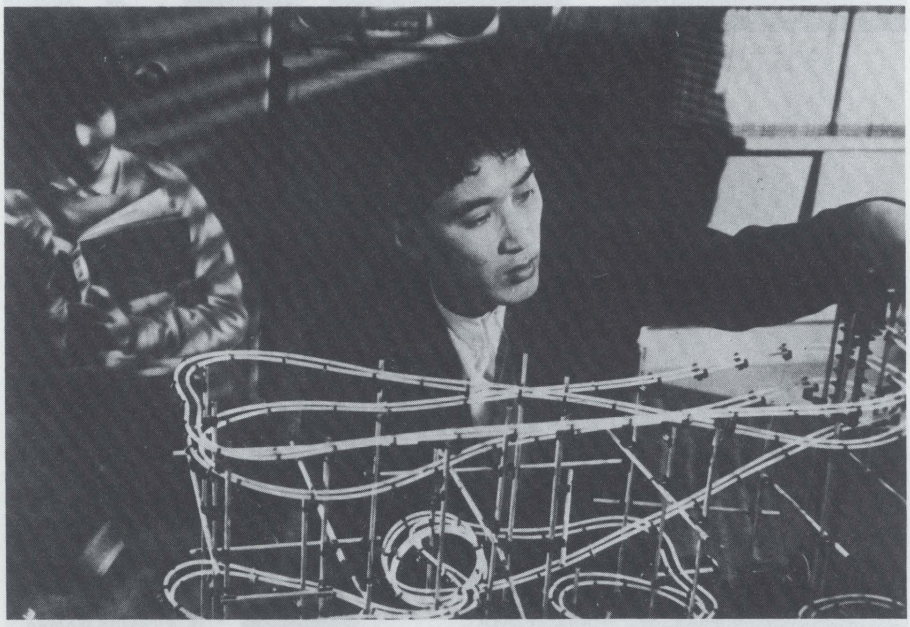
Despite these miscalculations, *Comic Magazine* is a genuinely modern picture. It tells the truth about certain aspects of the here-and-now and about the unremitting triviality of much contemporary Japanese culture. It could not, therefore, have been made at any other time. In that respect, it stands a little apart from other recent Japanese comedies and satires, which are tapping a tradition that has been long neglected. None more so than *To Sleep So As to Dream*, an almost hieratic (not to say precious) attempt to recreate the film-making styles of three different eras—1955, the 1920s and 1915. As part of the pastiche, it looks grainy, is shot in black and white and makes use of intertitles and of the *benshi*, who in the Japanese silent cinema provided a running commentary on the action.

To Sleep So As to Dream (the cod Shakespeare reference is just one of many red herrings) is a first film by Kaizo Hayashi, who had never before worked in a studio and brings to the movie the same kind of primitive inspiration that the Douanier Rousseau brought to painting in the late nineteenth century. For film buffs, one of the best jokes in the movie (albeit an esoteric one) is that it purports to rewrite film history. Look up any textbook and you will find that the very first Japanese movie to dispense with an *oyama* (female impersonator) was *The Glow of Life*, made in 1918. Fat lot they know. The truth is that a woman played a woman on the Japanese screen three years earlier in a little number called *The Eternal Mystery*—or so Kaizo Hayashi, tongue planted firmly in cheek, would have us believe.

Juzo Itami.

How does he know this? Turn to his movie and be amazed. It tells of the hiring, in the mid-1950s, of a detective to track down the daughter of an old lady who, she says, has been kidnapped by a gang of double-dealers masquerading under the name Pathé. The key to the mystery turns out to lie in an uncompleted 1915 film, production of which was aborted by a police raid. It was the first Japanese movie to star a woman (who proves to be the old lady in her youth) and was closed down because the notion of women playing women was regarded as an affront to public decency. All a bit chichi, perhaps, but the mock-silent movies that feature in the film are undeniably a *tour de force*.

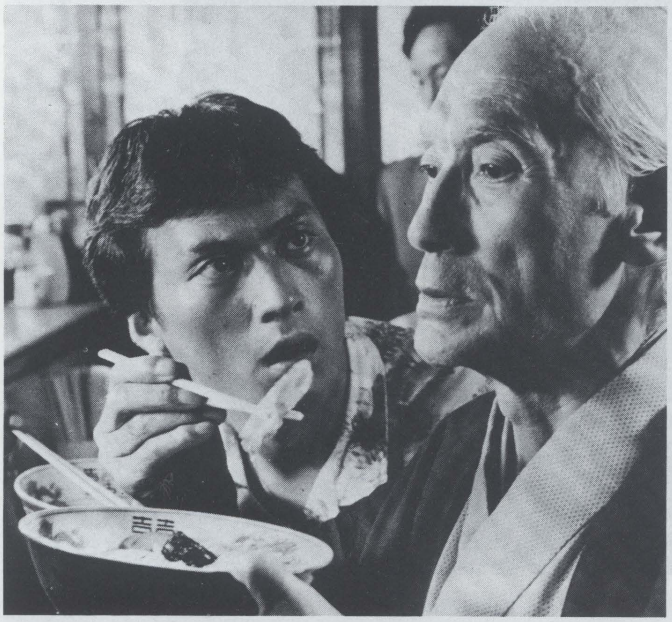
At 54, Juzo Itami is the veteran of the new Japanese satirists, but not (famous father notwithstanding) as a



Family Game.

Comic Magazine.

Family group in *The Funeral.*



Ken Watanabe and Ryutaro Otomo in *Tampopo.*

Nobuko Miyamoto in *A Taxing Woman.*

moviemaker. He has been an essayist, translator, chat-show host and above all an actor, with a career stretching back through numerous performances for Kon Ichikawa (notably in *I Am a Cat* and *The Makioka Sisters*) to his first role in *55 Days at Peking* in 1963. To make movies rather than just act in them, he embarked on a crash course in cinematography after appearing in *Family Game* in 1983 and wrote and directed his first film the following year.

The Funeral, which became the most talked-about Japanese film in 1984, evolved out of his own experience in handling his father-in-law's funeral rites. Though the film is not autobiographical, first-hand knowledge lends it an intimacy and a richness of ironic detail unusual in a comedy of its kind. Witness the humorous tracking shot behind the mourners' backs, which graphically illustrates how uncomfortable it is to squat for hours on your haunches.

The Funeral is Itami's most compact film—a concentrated study of the three days of a typical Buddhist wake, rather like *Living* seen from a comic perspective. But the ancient rites and customs that figure so naturally in Kurosawa's film have been all but forgotten in modern Japan. So elaborate is the ritual, so formalised and stereotyped the permitted expression of grief, that the mourners in Itami's film have to mug up the etiquette from a video and hope they can remember the appropriate turn of phrase on the day.

Some of the film's main comic effects stem from the contrast between tradition and its mercenary underpinnings. Chishu Ryu (Ozu's perennial father figure and a name to conjure with if ever there was one) features here as a Buddhist priest who officiates at the funeral and is the epitome of correct procedure. He at least knows what to do, but times being what they are, he demands a fat fee for his services and drives up (how else?) in a shiny white Rolls. And the grief-stricken relatives turn into demonic paper-chasers when an untimely gust scatters the incense money (cash gifts to help the bereaved meet the funeral expenses) to the four winds.

Itami spares none of his characters' pretensions and peccadilloes. All are mercilessly exposed—from the widow who invents a more dignified excuse for failing to notice that her husband is dying of a coronary on the patio (she was washing up at the time and could not be bothered to answer the old curmudgeon's call), to the son-in-law who lets his hair and a lot else down when the local vamp makes eyes at him at the wake.

For those who care for it, there is also a delicious thread of black humour. Itami films the family gathered round the coffin from the viewpoint of the deceased so that they look like a party of ghouls and he gets maximum comic mileage from the last trip to the crematorium. 'Yes,' the family is told, 'the furnace has multiple settings. We don't

use a high one for babies. It would burn up all their bones, so we cook babies rather gently.'

Tampopo, Itami's second film, does for food what *The Funeral* did for death. It is the most joyous of the three pictures he has made to date, an unlikely Odyssey in search of the perfect noodle. Tampopo (whose name means Dandelion) is the worst cook in Tokyo. Everybody rates her *ramen* (noodle) shop the pits. So she hires Goro, an itinerant truck-driver, to recruit a band of gourmet cooks to teach her the tricks of the trade and beat the big restaurant chains at their own game. It's a short-order *Seven Samurai* or, if you prefer, a *Shane* in a chef's hat. Itami himself calls it a *ramen* Western and indeed Goro, his job done, drives off down the highway at the end for all the world like Alan Ladd heading for the faraway hills.

But that's only the nub of the movie. Unashamedly anecdotal, it spices up the menu with a feast of unrelated but tasty side-orders, all on the common theme of eating. A gangster and his moll perform an erotic act of osculation with the help of a raw egg; an old granny whizzes round a supermarket squeezing the cream out of eclairs, hotly pursued by the manager armed with a fly swat; a lesson in the delicate western art of eating spaghetti in silence is interrupted by the joyful squelching of a contented tourist tucking in to a plateful of pasta at the adjoining table; best of all, a covey of corporate stuffed shirts, patently discombobulated in a posh French restaurant, is upstaged by their gormless younger colleague, who turns out to know his way round a wine list better than they do.

Tampopo has the big heart of a *bon viveur*. It pokes fun at its characters only because people in thrall to a four-square meal are inherently amusing. It's a gourmet's salute to the ecstasy of eating: 'To man, eating and sex are the same thing intrinsically,' Itami says. 'I wanted to describe people in a situation where sex and eating are not yet clearly separated.'

And *Tampopo* achieves just that. Its apotheosis (to the strains of Mahler) is the gangster's gory death scene. Blood-drenched from a sidewalk shootout, he yet has the presence of mind to instruct his tear-stained girlfriend in the finer points of cooking wild boar and turning its undigested innards into yam sausages.

Like all Juzo Itami's films, *Tampopo* stars his wife, Nobuko Miyamoto, in the leading role. *A Taxing Woman*, the most recent, casts her in her toughest part to date—that of a civil servant who has turned nobbling tax evaders into a substitute for sex. A taxing woman in all senses, she has a single-minded obsession with clapping fiscal swindlers into irons. It's a way of side-stepping a full human relationship, and in the end she settles for the emotionally sterile job she knows rather than run off with the attractive tax-dodger she has been relentlessly pursuing.

In this film Itami looks at tax evasion at both ends of the business scale—from the small-time pachinko parlour racketeer to the real-estate tycoon whose largest (undisclosed) source of income is a chain of love hotels. Before writing the script, Itami conducted extensive field research among the army of tax officials responsible for bringing both big crooks and petty criminals to book. One lesson of the film is that there is little distinction between them. Both are victims of a society that has turned materialism into a god.

A Taxing Woman is the most dramatic and, superficially, the least funny of Itami's three movies. Its cool, almost Bressonian focus on the mechanics of detection makes for a less immediately amusing film than its predecessors. Yet in some ways it is the most original of the three and the one that comes closest to putting Japan itself in the dock. The verdict, though, is an open one. 'In trying to internationalise itself,' says Juzo Itami, 'Japan tried to adopt an international language and the language it happened to choose was money.' But is that necessarily the root of all evil? 'Money,' he says, 'has tended to blur class distinctions, erasing the difference between urbanites and those in the hinterlands and bringing more equality to the sexes. In its often mindless pursuit of money, the Japanese nation is actually socialising itself.' ■

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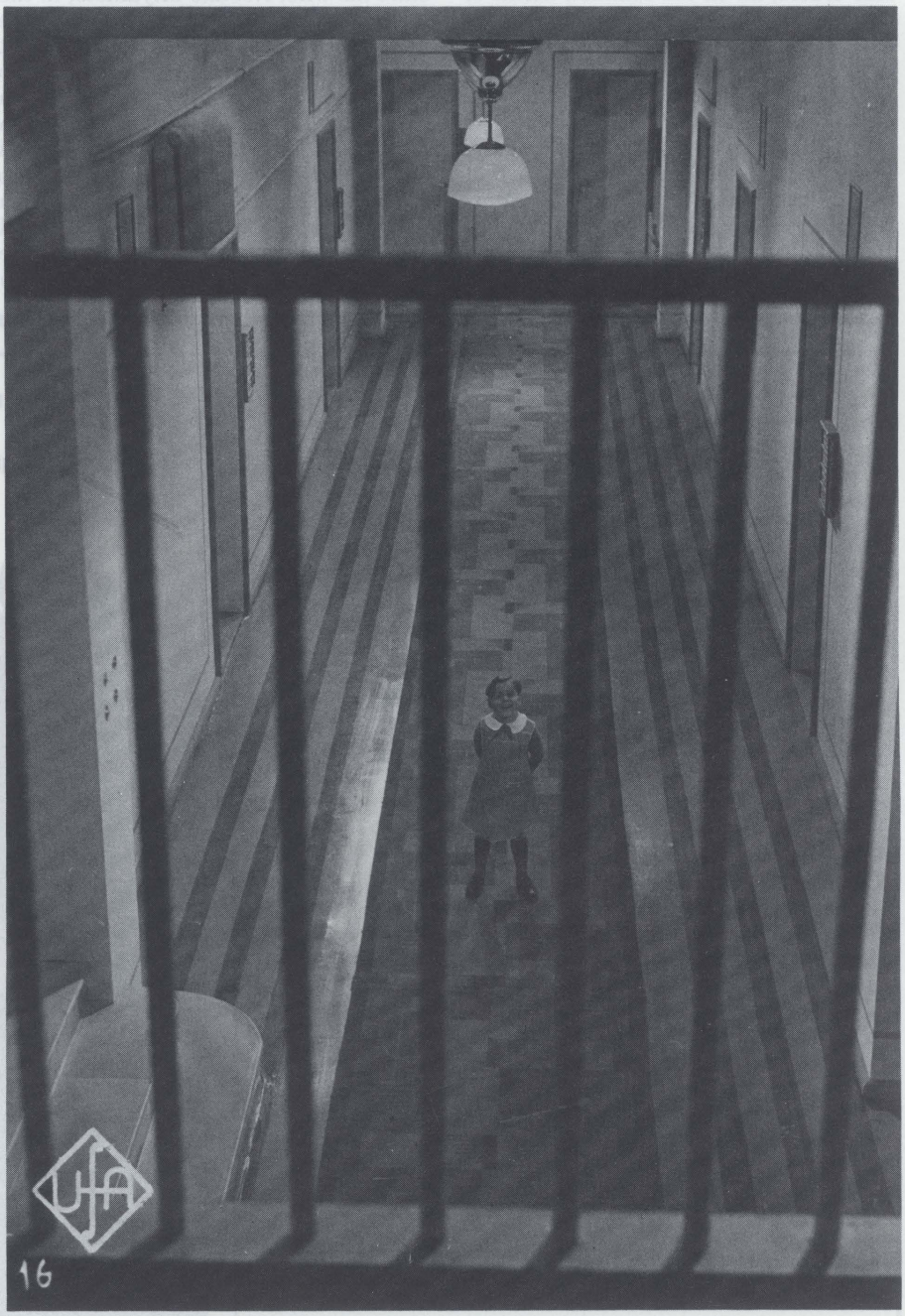
SIRK in Germany

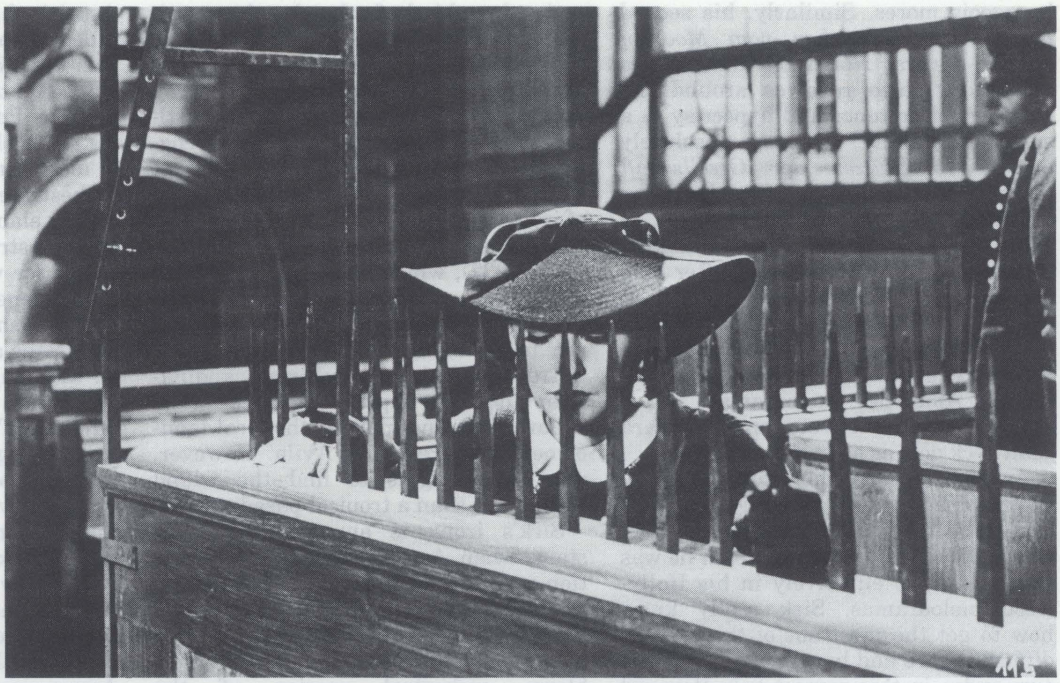
Julian Petley

By the time Douglas Sirk died, almost exactly a year ago, admiration for his films had finally ceased to be regarded as an obscure form of cultism or a sign of critical lunacy. All the same, Sirk's reputation still rests on a very limited number of works, namely the melodramas which he made for Universal during the 1950s: *Magnificent Obsession*, *All That Heaven Allows*, *Written on the Wind*, *The Tarnished Angels*, *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* and *Imitation of Life*. A mere six films, in fact, out of a total of thirty-nine, while many of the rest still languish in undeserved obscurity.

The critical concentration on Sirk's late melodramas as social portraits of Eisenhower's America has eclipsed, for instance, his lyrical, almost Thoreauesque evocation of rural Americana in the loose trilogy *Has Anybody Seen My Gal?*, *Meet Me at the Fair* and *Take Me to Town*. Similarly, the determination to celebrate Sirk as an essentially American director, a determination intimately bound up with the Hollywood orientation of *la politique des auteurs*, both in France and elsewhere, has led many critics to overlook the European dimensions of much of his work in America.

Sirk's first Hollywood film was *Hitler's Madman* (1944), the story of the assassination of the Reichsprotektor of Czechoslovakia, Reinhard Heydrich. And the three films which followed all have a distinctly European, even if not specifically German, feel to them: *Summer Storm*, set in pre-Revolutionary Russia and based on Chekhov's story *The Shooting Party*; *A Scandal in Paris*, a version of the life of François Vidocq, the former criminal who became head of the Sûreté in nineteenth-century Paris; and a story of white slave trading, *Lured/Personal Column*, which is set in early twentieth-century London and is a remake of Siodmak's *Pièges*. Sirk's collaborators on these films included the ineffably European George Sanders in





Right:
Zarah Leander in *Zu neuen Ufern*.

Left:
Peter Bosse in *Schlussakkord*.

the above trio, Hanns Eisler (*A Scandal in Paris*), the Russian art director Nicolai Remishoff (*Lured*) and Eugen Shuftan, who photographed (uncredited, because of union difficulties) *Summer Storm*, *A Scandal in Paris* and also *Hitler's Madman*, where his work can be seen to great dramatic effect in the shadowy and extraordinarily malevolent scene of Heydrich's death. In this context, it is also worth noting the settings of *Thunder on the Hill* (a convent in rural Norfolk), *Sign of the Pagan* (the story of Attila the Hun; the closest that Sirk got to his cherished project of filming *Tamburlaine*), *Captain Lightfoot* (early nineteenth-century Ireland) and of course the great war melodrama *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (Germany and Russia in the closing stages of World War Two).

Sirk's unrealised projects also included several films with European connotations, among them remakes of his German masterpiece *Zu neuen Ufern*, and of *M*, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and Pabst's *Herrin von Atlantis*. Other proposed European films included an adaptation of Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*, the story of the Children's Crusade, a biography of the doctor/magician Cagliostro, based on Alexandre Dumas' *Memoirs of a Physician* and planned with George Sanders in the leading role, and a project written by Sirk and Ionesco about the painter Utrillo and his mother Suzanne Valadon.

If Sirk's more 'European' films and projects have hardly received their due, the same is true of his properly European works, both the features which he made in the 1930s in the Third Reich and the short films which he directed at the Munich film school in the 70s. It's surprising that his 1930s films have been so neglected, given that Sirk discovered the cinematic melodrama during his Third Reich period and there developed the aesthetic strategies which he was later to put to such devastating effect in his American work. His films stand out like beacons in the aesthetic poverty of Third Reich cinema as a whole, easily bearing comparison with contemporaneous Ophuls and Lubitsch. Finally, Sirk's situation in the Third Reich and later in Eisenhower's America exhibit interesting parallels; in each case (though of course in entirely different ways) Sirk found himself working in an uncongenial ideological climate and faced with artistic restrictions and limitations. Accordingly, he adopted very specific stylistic attitudes when dealing with often intractable material.

Sirk directed his first feature in 1935 after fifteen years work in the German theatre, where he established a considerable reputation both as a director of groundbreaking new work and as an imaginative and often radical interpreter of the classics, both German and foreign. As Thomas Elsaesser put it in the 1972 Edinburgh Film Festival book on Sirk, his 'artistic talents and intellectual interests made him one of the representative figures of that aspect of Germany's literary and theatrical tradition—socially committed, basically left wing, and uncompromisingly scathing about chauvinism and cultural provincialism in any form—which, though present since the Enlightenment, had never occupied such a central place in social and political life as it did in the 1920s.'

From contemporary reports, it is clear that Sirk paid immense care to the look of his productions, realising that the meaning of the plays he directed lay as much, if not more, in their *mise en scène* as in the words spoken by the actors. Sirk's ideological leanings can be judged by the number of radical writers whose works he staged: Büchner, Wedekind, Kaiser, Bronnen and especially Brecht/Weill (whose *The Threepenny Opera* he directed at the Schauspielhaus, Bremen, in 1928/9). Weill also provided the music for Sirk's last major theatrical production in the Third Reich, Georg Kaiser's *Der Silbersee*, staged in Leipzig in 1933. The play, which received its British premiere only last year, was a clear anti-Nazi parable and outraged the S.A., who tried to barrack it off the stage while the rest of the audience supported it equally vociferously. Sirk himself called this 'the greatest political scandal there had even been in the theatre'; Hans Rothe, the famous translator of Shakespeare, wrote later that this was the hour in which the curtain rang down on the German stage.

Writing sixteen years ago, at the time of the pioneering Sirk retrospective at Edinburgh, Jon Halliday said of Sirk's German work: 'The surprise of the films (quite apart from their excellence) is both political—to see what could still be made in Germany in 1937—and "stylistic". The pre-1933 traditions are preserved, even enlivened, but within a highly unlikely format—one which the critics, inevitably, have largely failed to appreciate. Who was ready then—or now—to give attention to a (fused) combination of the traditions of Weill, Ophuls, Brecht and Sternberg, melted down and transformed by Sirk, five years after Hitler had come to power?' Sadly, nothing has changed in the intervening years.

Sirk's major achievement in the Third Reich was the trio of melodramas *Schlussakkord*, *Zu neuen Ufern* and *La Habanera*. But even when faced with less promising material—his first feature, *April! April!* (1935), a sort of Viennese *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, or *Das Hofkonzert* (1936), which he described as 'a piece of Viennese pastry'—Sirk marked himself out by the care which he devoted to the *mise en scène*. *Das Hofkonzert* in particular is distinguished by some highly elegant mobile camerawork and by a number of absolutely stunning transitions between scenes. Even the theme of *April! April!*—ludicrous middle-class pretensions—distinctly prefigures Sirk's later and considerably more famous dissections of

bourgeois mores. Similarly, his second feature, *Das Mädchen vom Moorhof* (1935), a rural North German *Romeo and Juliet*, also revolves around the exposure of pretence and hypocrisy in a small community, a theme absolutely central to *Stützen der Gesellschaft* (1935), which is based on Ibsen's *Pillars of Society* (directed on stage by Sirk in 1923). Concerning as it does a character's return to his home town after long years of absence, and the unveiling of all sorts of forgotten events and repressed emotions that follows, *Stützen* even prefigures one of Sirk's lesser-known American melodramas, *All I Desire*, where the returning Barbara Stanwyck acts as a similar catalyst.

As mentioned earlier, Sirk in these years worked out, in a highly conscious and deliberate way, most of the elements of the *mise en scène* which he was later to use so effectively in his Hollywood melodramas. Sirk really knew how to get the most out of this always difficult genre and how to adapt it to his own ends—in this respect only Ray and Minnelli could touch him. It was here that his remarkable sense of *mise en scène* came into its own: he was fully aware of how purely formal elements can be used to work against the grain, to throw into question what the film appears on the surface to be 'saying'.

As Paul Willemen has pointed out with reference to Sirk's American films, the director, by intensifying melodramatic conventions, 'by stylising the treatment of a given narrative, succeeded in introducing, in a quite unique manner, a distance between the film and its narrative pretext.' This argument is equally valid in the case of his three great German melodramas. And this stylisation and intensification is achieved in a variety of ways: by the use of direct, unequivocal symbols as emotional stimuli; by the highly expressive use of music; by setting the action in a kind of echo chamber reminiscent of the stage; by foregrounding the processes of artistic creation (most notably in *Schlussakkord*) and thereby making the audience aware of the artifice of what it is watching; by choreography used as a direct expression of character, by a highly developed sense of irony, and so on.

Irony is much to the fore in *La Habanera* (1937), which was Sirk's last German film and starred Zarah Leander, the nearest the Third Reich cinema ever got to a sex symbol. Here she plays Astrée Sternhjelm, a young Scandinavian who, on a trip to Puerto Rico, falls in love with and marries the local landowner, Don Pedro de Avila. However, she soons begins to find the island rather less than a tropical paradise.

Sirk's irony is apparent from the start, when Astrée's excessive infatuation with Puerto Rico makes her appear like a parody of a tourist. Then there is the very small-town bullfight accompanied (on the soundtrack only) by a full-blown orchestral version of the Toreador's Song from *Carmen*. As Sirk said, 'This is irony dressed up as romanticism. It sets off the contrast between the allure of the Ferdinand Marian character [Don Pedro] and his achievement. The bullfight sets the scene for the gloom that is to come. And it resumes much of the falseness of the situation.' Like Sir Albert Finsbury in *Zu neuen Ufern*, Don Pedro is no conventional melodramatic villain but a tragic character in his own right, who is at least in part the victim of Astrée's ridiculous fantasies about Puerto Rico.

Music plays a key role in *La Habanera*, and in particular the song which gives the film its name. The first time, it is sung by a taxi-driver in very florid style and against palpably 'false' back-projection: the effect is almost a parody of cinematic exotica. Later, it is sung by a group of musicians on the dock as Astrée's ship is about to depart: now the tones are much more seductive and it is this that finally persuades her to jump ship. The third time is at a party given by Don Pedro: it is ten years on and Astrée is planning to leave, yet the song is more languorous than ever and Sirk orchestrates the whole scene with stunningly elaborate camera movements between Astrée, Don Pedro and the young doctor for whom she has fallen. By the final scene the effect is devastating: Astrée's ship is about to sail and the musicians are again playing seductively on the quay. Astrée sighs, 'For the last two weeks I've cursed this island but now . . .' The camera catches a strange look of longing on her face, and the final image is of churning water, resuming the watery imagery that has haunted the film and which is a recurrent feature of Sirk's German work.

Thus, by largely formal means, Sirk actually managed almost to invert the significance of the original plot (which is not without its racist overtones of Aryan superiority). This would be quite a feat at any time, and was even more remarkable in the heavily policed cultural wasteland of the Third Reich.

Equally striking is *Zu neuen Ufern* (1937) which also starred Zarah Leander, here playing Gloria Vane, a famous singer in eighteenth-century England who takes the rap for a crime committed by her lover Sir Albert Finsbury and is sent to Paramatta Penitentiary in Australia. In terms of plot, this is Sirk's most substantial German work, and for its time and place a remarkably tough, critical and sophisticated view of a bourgeois society in its early stages of growth. Finsbury, for instance, is quite explicitly presented as a member of a declining (though still influential) aristocracy threatened by the growth of the new middle class of merchants and tradesmen. In other hands he could easily have been just another

***La Habanera*: Zarah Leander.**

Das Hofkonzert.

moustachio-twirling villain, but thanks to Sirk's direction and Willy Birgel's playing, he achieves a genuinely tragic dimension; witness the scene of his suicide, in which he regards himself in one of the many reflections which haunt this and other Sirk films. Sirk was always fascinated, he said, by the doubtful, the ambiguous, the uncertain. 'Uncertainty, and the vagueness of men's aims, are central to many of my films, however hidden these characteristics may be. I am interested in circularity, in the circle—people arriving back at the place they started out from. This is why you will find what I call tragic rondos in many of my films, people going in circles. This is what most of my characters are doing.'

In terms of style, the film's nearest relation seems to be the Brecht/Weill *The Threepenny Opera*. As Halliday has noted, the influence is evident not only 'in the combination of music, songs and dialogue but in the assemblage of contrasts, of light, of class, of geography.' This is nowhere clearer than in the scene of Gloria Vane's trial, which is introduced by an old crone singing about Paramatta outside the courtroom, makes great play with the contrast between the flea-bitten street and the solemnity of the court, and then moves, via a dazzling transition, to Paramatta itself.

Schlussakkord (1936), Sirk's first great melodrama, demonstrates his powers of stylisation at their height. The story revolves around Hanna, who returns from America to Germany in search of her son Peter, who unknown to her has been adopted by the famous conductor Garvenberg and his wife Charlotte. Hanna becomes Peter's nanny and Garvenberg's confidante, thus arousing Charlotte's jealousy . . . The plot may sound less than impressive in summary (this, after all, is melodrama) but Sirk's *mise en scène* must be seen to be believed. It also introduces something of a distance between itself and the material which it is supposedly serving, notably through the use of various sub-dramas which comment ironically on the action.

The opening of *Schlussakkord* is a frenzied, delirious New Year's Eve in New York (astonishingly recreated in the studio) which establishes a real sense of *dépaysement*. This is followed by an even more extraordinary sequence in which music plays a crucial dramatic role. Garvenberg is conducting Beethoven's Ninth, and Sirk introduces into the scene both Garvenberg's personal drama (by cutting away to his wife's empty seat in the concert hall) and Hanna's (she is dying from grief in New York, to which the concert is being relayed by radio). Sirk cuts repeatedly between Germany and New York, making great play (again) with shots of the sea, and as Hanna hears the music she begins to revive and resolves to return to her child. Her thoughts of Peter are counterpointed by Schiller's words 'und der Cherub steht vor Gott', a motif explicitly taken up in the film's stunning final scene, in which, to the accompaniment of Garvenberg conducting Handel in an ornate church, a breathtaking tracking shot soars over the heads of the musicians to discover, way up in the building, mother and child, icon-like amidst the baroque architecture, finally reunited.

No outline of Sirk's German work would be complete without mention of the three films which he directed at the Munich film school in the 1970s: *Sprich mit mir wie der Regen* (1975), *Sylvesternacht* (1977) and *Bourbon Street Blues* (1978). The first and third are based on one-act plays by Tennessee Williams (*Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen* and *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion* respectively). Williams' *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* was the last play Sirk directed (at the Thalia Theatre, Hamburg, in 1969). *Sylvesternacht* is based on a playlet by Arthur Schnitzler, one of the director's favourite dramatists, whose *Liebelei* and *Anatol's Hochzeitsmorgen* he had staged at the Bremen Schauspielhaus during the 1920s.

Das Mädchen vom Moorhof.

Although these three short films are almost unbearably intense distillations of Sirk's favourite themes and obsessions, they remain virtually unknown in Britain, never having been written about and graced with only one showing—at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1979. Their common theme is the destruction of dreams, and each is bathed in an atmosphere of melancholy and nostalgia. In *Sprich* (photographed by Dietrich Lohmann), virtually a monologue, a young woman in a wretched Manhattan apartment fantasises aloud to her lover about a better but imaginary life. The film makes great play with the characteristic metaphor of a rain-drenched window, and windows also play a key role in *Sylvesternacht*. Here a 'woman of a certain age' (Hanna Schygulla) stands looking out into a garden on New Year's Eve, reflecting on the insufficiency of amorous dreams both past and present. Reminiscent of Ophuls in tone, *Sylvesternacht* recalls in particular the mood of *Liebelei*, *De Mayerling à Sarajevo* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

The most elaborate of the trio is *Bourbon Street Blues*, in which the owner of a dilapidated New Orleans boarding house, Mrs Miller-Raczinski, who foolishly imagines herself to be descended from the Habsburgs, is drinking and dreaming herself into oblivion with her neighbour, a down-at-heel writer (Fassbinder) who thinks he is Anton Chekhov. Here the links with Sirk's other works are at their most explicit: through the window we glimpse the flashing neon sign of the Habanera Inn, the New Orleans setting recalls *The Tarnished Angels*, and of course Sirk himself had adapted Chekhov's *The Shooting Party* as *Summer Storm*. Most fascinating of all, however, is the casting of Fassbinder; here Sirk's fabled irony reaches its greatest heights. As Eithne Bourget aptly put it in one of the very few pieces written about any of these films in any language (*Positif*, April 1980): 'He symbolises Sirk, every cinéaste, every author, indeed every artist. In the ironic juxtaposition of the character—who does not have enough talent—and the actor—who has too much?—there is a critique of the artist, of the cinéaste [Sirk] himself who is, in the last analysis, only a creator of illusions. Impotent in the face of the corruption of humanity and the decline of society, all that is left to him is irony, by means of which he can transmute sentimentality into melancholy.' A fitting figure, indeed, for Douglas Sirk's last film. ■

There will be a season of Douglas Sirk's German films at the Goethe Institut in London in March 1988.

INDIAN FILM

STEPHEN HAGGARD

In Europe the moving image publicised itself from the beginning by using the pictorial wall-poster, bright, stylised and atmospheric. It was an advertising form adapted from other entertainments such as theatre and cabaret. In India there was no such poster tradition when the first domestic-produced film, Phalke's 'Raja Harischandra', was released in 1912. Yet the film poster is now one of India's major cultural phenomena.

In India the film poster is one of the first things which strikes the western visitor. Innumerable examples of these garish productions encrust any available urban wall. They show doe-eyed, fleshy female stars dressed in extravagant clothes and lavish jewellery, their cheeks and figures touched up to seem chubbier than life, their skin lightened to achieve a pale complexion and their lips reddened. The Indian male, who forms the majority of the cinema audience, fully appreciates the significance of these attributes: they are the idealised woman. The ideal Indian urban man as represented in these posters is equally fantastic: he is dark-eyed, moustached, muscular, usually involved in some vigorously martial (or marital) activity, and uncharacteristically slim. Information about screenings, cinemas or prices has no place here, for although the Indian cinema may be commercial, its posters are a supramundane, visionary form of art. Even the names of the actors are often omitted: Indian film stars have a semi-divine status and, like the gods, can be recognised instantly by everyone. Up to three languages, however, are used to announce the name of the film on the poster. The largest and most ornate typography is always reserved for Roman letters, while other scripts such as Perso-Arabic, Devanagari or Tamil provide a phonetic transliteration.

Is this the same art form that was pioneered by Ealing Studios, or greater poster artists like Anselmo Ballester? Or is the Indian film poster a separate development, a distant cousin pursuing an independent evolution in another continent? A little of both, perhaps. Restrained by the British Raj, the Indian film industry in the early twentieth century was neither populist nor organised enough to copy the West by running nationwide PR campaigns based on mass-produced posters. Publicity during this early period would have been as much verbal as visual, employing the conventional media of town-crier and newspaper. There was some open-air pictorial publicity for films, but it took the form of vast cut-outs and hoardings individually prepared and painted for installation at each screening venue. Every cinema would employ its own painter: in 1917 the director V. Shantaram began an illustrious film career in this way, painting pictures and signs outside the tin shed cinemas in the town of Kholapur. This form of cinema advertising still continues to tower over the Indian townscape, and one of India's most respected modern artists, M. F. Hussein, learned his skills from years spent preparing such gargantuan hoardings.

The film poster only became a conspicuous expression in Indian culture after the departure of the British and the death of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. The Mahatma had been no friend to the film industry, and even less to film advertising. He said in 1947 a few months before Independence: 'If I had my way, I would see to it that all the cinemas and theatres in India were converted into spinning halls and factories for handicrafts of all kinds. And what obscene photographs of actors and actresses are displayed in the newspapers by way of advertisement!'

But the new Indian dispensation prevailed over Gandhian politics, pursuing instead a socialist ideal of an expanding industrial nation, and film was to play an important role in this. The cinema offered powerful images of a new type of society to a people whose outlook was rapidly changing from static to dynamic. It was at this time that poster publicity emerged: the newspaper pictures despised by Gandhi took to the walls. Every surface could carry images which stimulated the emotions and fantasies of the commonest man or woman. The poster became a form of icon, a public mirror in which the urban young in particular could idealise themselves in the new roles of their changing society. For although film plots were mostly set in traditional or historical society, posters were free to proclaim a new dispensation of glamour, personality and emotion—often with only the barest relevance to the film advertised.

The ubiquitous presence of these large, powerful idealisations has undoubtedly contributed to the character of modern urban India. Posters are a constant public reference point all over every city, showing the look, dress and pose of those who represent the new elites of the society. In words from a recent Tamil play about the role of posters in Indian life, 'the posters with their huge lettering provide the new classics for children to grow with.' Posters such as the one for *Hariyali aur Rasta* shown here suggested a cult of emotion. A man and a woman depicted together in a public secular work of art showed how romantic love could have a socially acceptable face—a new idea for India.

The prototypes for these first posters were borrowed partly from the West: some of the dewiness of Hollywood designs is often apparent, particularly during the 1950s. One also finds borrowings from the strong, flowing drawings of Ealing, as in the rather bewitching poster for Jaswantlal's *Anarkali* (1952). But poster artists also drew on major Indian visual traditions. There is, for example, a characteristically Indian inventiveness with colour in the painting of faces. Poster portraits are usually based on photographs, but this still leaves scope for the vibrant colorations so characteristic of all Indian art. The two great rival male stars of the 1970s, Dharmendra and Amitabh Bachchan, are often given dark blue flesh in posters—the same skin colour as the much adored Indian god Krishna. Indian cinema has always been more governed by the traditions of popular theatre and epic, showing little concern to imitate the canons of western film. Krishna was in fact reincarnated by Dharmendra in the film *Mera Gaon, Mera Desh*, where he perches in a tree to watch village girls bathing in the water—a well-known episode in the legends of Krishna. Not surprisingly, therefore, the traditions of Indian popular religious art have drawn the film poster away from western aesthetics and into the realms of idealisation, multicoloured faces, and a healthy chubbiness.

Lurid colours are, however, not the universal characteristic of Indian film posters. A film as well loved and as much screened as *Mother India*, Mehboob's classic of rural hardship, requires relatively little garishness to publicise its re-releases. The emblematic figure of Nargis the heroine pulling the plough or holding a child has enough iconographic force by itself. Guru Dutt's films were usually accompanied by posters fairly restrained in style if bold in content. Their subject is often intense emotional passion—the poster for *Pyaasa* (1957), a film screened in the NFT Indian Masters series, shows Dutt kissing the forehead of Waheeda Rehman whose eyes are closed, perhaps in ecstasy—the image is

POSTERS

not taken from any scene in the film so one cannot tell. Another contrast is with posters for the films of Satyajit Ray, whose dislike of the aesthetics of Indian commercial cinema is well known. His posters have invariably been refined and artistic productions, but in this case their maker was Ray himself, who started his career in an advertising agency.

In the West, more recent film posters have gradually moved away from general atmospheric compositions, and have concentrated their message in a single simplified scene which becomes an emblem of the whole film. In India, posters from the last decade developed in the opposite direction. During the 1970s, such a plethora of images was fitted into each poster, that the advertising threatened to become cinematic in its own right. For the new *masala* (mixed spice) films, so many actors required representation, and so many sensational events had to be shown in the publicity, that a new poster formula was needed. An artist called Divalkar developed it: a chaotic but highly atmospheric sprawl of faces, fights, flirtations and fancy dress enjoying no apparent interconnection.

The representation of stars' faces seems likely to remain the main emphasis of posters for the commercial cinema in India. The stars sell the film, and in such an intensely visual culture a picture goes further than a name written in Roman script. Artists have therefore been reluctant to try their skills at freehand drawing: recognition of faces is so important that photographs are invariably the basis of poster composition. Despite this, the poster is rarely allowed to be recognisably photographic: any print of a face must ostentatiously be filled out, coloured in, brightened up and its features highlighted before it can be pasted into a poster layout. Only in this idealised form can it attract viewers. The most recent developments, however, have left behind the excesses of posters such as *Amar Akbar Anthony*. The 'new' or 'parallel' cinema has produced some strikingly minimal styles of poster art, featuring bold abstract designs as part of the effect. The composition still hinges upon photographs of each major star, although the photographs are touched up less flamboyantly now. The original fleshy idiom has been sacrificed in favour of a more spartan aesthetic which is, regrettably, not a spontaneous development of Indian taste, but a western import. ■

Posters by courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The Beekeeper: Marcello Mastroianni (Spyros).

Out of a dead land

The Beekeeper/David Wilson

'You have to begin to lose your memory . . . to realise that memory is what makes our lives. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.' The words are Buñuel's, but they would make a fitting epitaph for *The Beekeeper* (Artificial Eye). Thodoros Angelopoulos' new film charts a doomed encounter between two generations for whom the past means everything and nothing. For Spyros, in late middle age, the past is the meaning to his life, and ought to fashion the future. His personal history is also, and inextricably, the tormented history of his country and the ideals he had for it. The teenage girl he meets on a journey through this country represents a generation with collective amnesia, a generation for whom the past has no meaning and the future is a casual encounter with the next moment.

Spyros was also the name of the central character of Angelopoulos' previous film, *Voyage to Cythera*, which ended in an image of bleak silence, sustained almost beyond endurance. An image also of isolation, as the Spyros of that film, a returned exile, was left on a raft at sea to contemplate the land he knew no more. *The Beekeeper* begins with an image of isolation. Spyros, a schoolteacher, is at the winter wedding of his daughter somewhere in northern Greece. Somehow troubled by the event, a landmark in his family history which he is unable to confront, he drifts away from the ritual. In one of those extended sequence shots familiar from Angelopoulos' previous films (but here used sparingly) the camera follows him as he walks along a river bank and across a bridge. The very length of the shot, and its stillness in movement, invites contemplation. In suggesting memory, as yet undelineated, the sequence asks us to follow this man and look with him at a past which has brought him to such an impasse with the present. The rest of the film subverts those expectations: we learn little about this man's past, private or public. If in his previous films Angelopoulos has uniquely and idiosyncratically confronted the history of his country, it is the present that now concerns him. He sees in it, through the numbed eyes of his protagonist, a desolate landscape.

The present is naturally that of Greece, a Greece in which the phoenix (named Papandreou) which rose from the ashes of dictatorship has somehow failed to fly. But the land traversed by the film offers a familiar present: a soulless, homogenised, EEC-harmonised landscape of power stations, motorway stops, fast food and empty noise. The melancholy vista extends beyond national boundaries. As often in cinema, it is a journey that represents both the state of a nation and a state of mind. Spyros has inherited his father's beehives, and as the damp Greek winter begins to turn into spring and the promise of flowers he travels south to inspect the hives, weed out the defunct colonies, set up new ones. It is a journey into the past, punctuated on the soundtrack by extracts from the diary of a previous journey, and a hope for the future. Except that for Spyros there is no future, because the present makes no connections with the past he knows.

Signposts. At one point Spyros drives his truck, the camera following in a single distant perspective, along a hillside track which suddenly gives out; at another, he visits the house he once lived in, its paint now faded, the view from the broken windows no longer as he remembers it. Meanwhile he has encountered the present, in the casually insistent form of a teenage girl (Nadia Mourouzi) who asks him to take her along with him, wherever he is going. The girl has no history ('I don't remember anything') and is given no name. She drifts from one place to the next, as featureless and disconnected as the clothes she wears and the roadside stops she momentarily inhabits. At one of these stops Spyros finds her dancing to a jukebox record, mindless of the world and of his watching presence. Later he discovers her at a fast food canteen, an incongruous gleaming excrescence in an old town square (Angelopoulos' cameraman is again Giorgos Arvanitis, and again he works wonders with the cold colours of this landscape). Their encounters are frequent and fleeting, and for Spyros both an irritation and a lure. In spite of himself, he tries to make contact with this insubstantial present.

In this world the past can only be a memory for people of a fading generation. A central sequence hauntingly evokes this sense of forlorn memory. With a friend, Spyros visits an old comrade, a Frenchman (Serge Reggiani) who came to Greece in 1948 to fight in the civil war for the cause they all believed in. Now dying in hospital, the man wants to look at the sea for the last time, and his two friends smuggle him and a bottle of good wine out to a beach at dawn. Memory fuelled by the wine, the man recalls those better times when they dreamed of changing the world. It is a scene of profound melancholy, yet the cold dawn light denies the indulgence of nostalgia. Angelopoulos is not concerned merely to revisit the past, another country where mistakes were also made. When Spyros breaks his journey to visit his wife, he asks her to stand in the light for a moment, then abruptly leaves. Memory has meaning: Spyros' daughter explains her husband's hostility to him by saying that he comes from the Mani, an area in the far south of Greece which saw some ruthless acts of vengeance during the civil war—'And you know how it is, they don't forget.' But memory cannot in itself sustain a future. The beehives need periodically to be renewed, or moved to a better position.

Spyros comes to terms with this truth through his relationship with the girl who sporadically tags along with him. Her capriciousness provokes him into silence. When she unblinkingly brings back a young soldier to spend the night with her in the hotel room she shares

with Spyros, he pulls his blanket over his head to shut out their aimless sex. He has already refused the girl's casual offer ('O.K., papa') to him. But now, as she goes through the motions, she is looking not at the soldier but at Spyros, bemused by his immobility as he is by her fickleness. For all their disconnection there is a tentative complicity between them, and for Spyros at least a wish for contact more than casual. A desire that can even bring him out of what seems at times an almost catatonic listlessness. Seeing the girl in a restaurant with a boy, he drives his truck through the plate-glass window. Later, as he clumsily tries to make love to her on the deck of a deserted ferry, the girl is disturbed by his sudden impulsiveness.

It is in another empty space that they finally make a kind of contact. Spyros takes the girl to a cinema he used to frequent in his youth, abandoned now except for the old friend who lovingly tends the long since silent projector. On the stage, beneath the blank white screen, he attempts a sexual contact. But there can be no connection between these people from different worlds, either physical (Spyros remains fully dressed) or emotional. Angelopoulos' camera watches from the stalls, a desolate image for a desolate act: as in *The Travelling Players*, theatre intrudes on life. The scene ends with a shot of Spyros, now himself seated in the stalls, staring at the empty screen. For Spyros, the journey can only end in oblivion, from the stings of his bees. As he dies on the hillside overlooking the town which holds his memories, the camera closes on his fist, clenched in pain.

In the bleakness of its images, and in the way it uses landscape as a correlative of emotional narcosis, Angelopoulos' film at times recalls the Antonioni of the early 1960s, *La Notte* and *Red Desert* in particular. No surprise, then, to discover that Tonino Guerra collaborated on the script. And Spyros is played by Marcello Mastroianni—an extraordinary performance, hinging on silence and self-effacement. In the cinema at least, we can still make connections with the past. □

Underneath the arches

Sammy and Rosie Get Laid/Jill Forbes

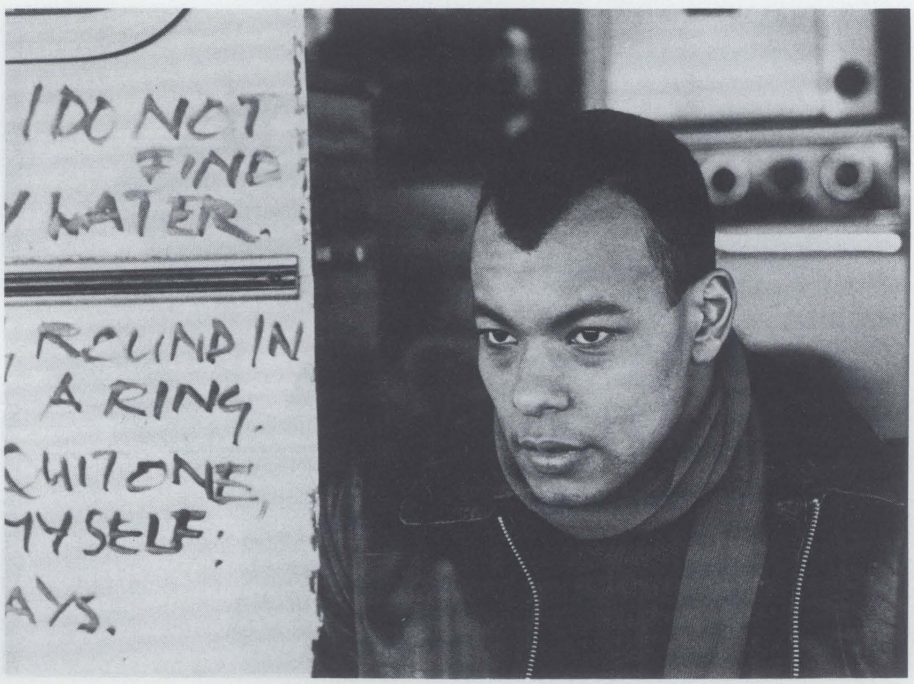
Westway is the Ariadne's thread of Hanif Kureishi's moral universe, cutting through the blighted Paddington hinterland that, paradoxically, spawns such creative activity. It is astonishing how fertile this wasteland has been: the back end of Bayswater is Colin MacInnes' Napoli; it is where Iris Murdoch's Jake once disported himself, and it is where John le Carré invariably locates the seedy boarding-houses wherein shelter sad exiles from Eastern Europe. For Kureishi, Westway sums up speed and desolation, colour and violence—in a word, an idealised London that, if it ever existed, is rapidly ceding to gentrification. Go to Napoli today and it's full of des. res., yet *My Beautiful Laundrette* merrily set aside the realities of property speculation and improbably sited a cold-water bed-sit next to the motorway, while in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (Palace), Kureishi's latest film, the Ladbroke Grove area is made to look like a cross between Brixton and Wood Green. All this is not to say that writers should really be estate agents, but simply to point to the evocative power of a location that the passage of time has rendered more and more mythic. Not even Mulvey and Wollen were able to make it look real, and no one should assume that Hanif Kureishi's background makes him a documentarist of the 'Play for Today' school.

Sammy and Rosie is a writer's and actors' film. Hanif Kureishi's charm and talent lie in his penchant for a romanticised street life in combination with unusual relationships. This is what happily saves him from earnestness. Here the eponymous couple are thoroughly modern, or so it would seem, semi-detached but still best friends and wondering if after all they ought to have a child but finding themselves on the whole unable to take the plunge. Rosie is a professional carer while Sammy makes a profession of irresponsibility, and between them, as a set-piece party scene suggests, they contrive to befriend examples of most of the well-documented types that frequent the city streets.

But Sammy and Rosie, who may get laid but not by each other, are acted off the screen and out of mind by relations or friends who have a firmer idea of what life is about. Sammy's father, played by the extraordinary Shashi Kapoor, comes back to England after all these years making money and helping to run a military dictatorship in the sub-continent. He is a hard man who late in life repents of the way he treated the son he abandoned in England and wants to give him some money. He also wants to look up Alice, a landlady he had loved many years ago; but hers is quite another England, to be found somewhere leafy and suburban, the sort of place that successful Asian businessmen aspire to and successful East End crooks send their mothers: driveways, mock wattle-and-daub and isolation. Totteridge, for example. Alice has harboured a passion all these years and intends to indulge it now she is a widow. Claire Bloom's part is little more than a cameo, but big enough to note her increasing resemblance to the Chaplin family and the fact that she is emphatically not Celia Johnson.

Finally, there is Danny, a benign, black Mephistopheles, whose enigmatic smile haunts the screen. He contrives to be present at every significant event, when the police raid the house of the woman who had minded him as a child, when the speculative bulldozers, directed by one of Alice's sons, move in and clear the site under the motorway. He alone has the *savoir vivre* which

***Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*: Roland Gift (Danny).**



derives from patience in the face of transience. His home is a caravan underneath the arches, the spiritual centre of the film towards which all the characters gravitate, and which is destroyed.

Kureishi, to my mind, has been praised for all the wrong reasons: he is not a realist nor does he have a multicultural message, but he does invent extravagant situations which border on the farcical (witness his liking for making characters shin down drainpipes). This is why he has found the perfect foil in Stephen Frears, whose eye for the comic grotesque is unerring and who is able to extract performances from actors that are rare in the cinema. Kureishi is not yet as acute an observer of human foibles as Alan Bennett and he is certainly not as mordant, but if the partnership with Frears continues he may become so.

On the other hand, *Sammy and Rosie* falls into the trap that lies in wait for farce. Towards the end it gets so seriously out of hand that the bemused viewer would willingly have allowed a few loose ends in return for being spared the pain of so much freneticism—which, incidentally, rather undermines the serenity and experience that had made Rafi and Alice such an attractive contrast to Sammy and Rosie. Too much is happening on the streets and it is too picturesque. Kureishi might yet write the British *West Side Story*; he has certainly initiated a genre which can probably be explored for some films to come. □

Detroit gunplay

RoboCop/Sean French

Now that imitators and repeated TV screenings have made *Star Wars* stale, it's easy to forget what gave its original freshness and excitement. George Lucas suggested that a futuristic science fiction film (please don't anyone write in reminding me that *Star Wars* is 'really' set 'long ago') didn't have to have to be about machines; it didn't have to be a moral fable: it could accommodate a straightforward cinematic genre like the adventure story. This is what gives the film its saving sprightliness, with its rumbustious John Williams score and the references to other quest films like *The Searchers* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

The film's second perception was that the future shouldn't be like a pristine architectural drawing. The film's visual effects now bear the scars of the financial constraints that plagued its production, but the grubby, rusty androids and battered spaceships still look terrific.

This double perception has spawned a hybrid cinematic form of its own: traditional film genres translated into a seedy, 'realistic' future world. *Outland*, for example, a Western in space (*High Noon*, to be precise); *Alien*, a horror film; *Blade Runner*, a private detective story; *Aliens*, a war movie (of the Vietnam type); *The Terminator*, a hitman thriller.

And now one of the most flamboyant (and profitable) of them all, a police movie: Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* (Rank). A summary of the film's plot makes it seem barely worth serious consideration by anyone but the DPP. Murphy (Peter Weller) is a decent, old-style policeman who is transferred to the toughest precinct in Detroit. While pursuing a psychopathic gang which is responsible for the deaths of 31 policemen, Murphy is trapped and brutally murdered. Happily, since this is taking place in the future, Murphy's remnants can be grafted on to the prototype of a new law enforcement robot developed by Omni-Consumer Products, a private company that controls Detroit. The resulting 'RoboCop' is then sent out on the streets to fight crime with predictably violent results. And, as anyone who has seen *Blade Runner* will suspect, RoboCop ultimately finds himself fighting against the company who made him.

***RoboCop*: Hero and villain.**

But matters are more complicated than they seem. It's worth considering *RoboCop*, and the other films I've cited, in the light of a contention by Umberto Eco in his essay, 'Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage' (published in his recent collection, *Faith in Fakes*). Eco argues that *Casablanca*'s cult status comes from the intuitive way it draws on a whole host of cinematic archetypes. It is these that we identify and respond to. But, he says, there is a new kind of film which he humorously terms 'metacult', a product of a 'Cult Culture'. He goes on to say that 'It would be semiotically uninteresting to look for quotations of archetypes in *Raiders* or in *Indiana Jones*. They were conceived within a metasemiotic culture, and what the semiotician can find in them is exactly what the directors put there. Spielberg and Lucas are semiotically nourished authors working for a culture of instinctive semioticians.'

There's nothing accidental about *RoboCop*. A number of people will see the film fearing, or perhaps hoping for, a crude, cybernetic reworking of *Death Wish*. But in a sophisticated fashion the film quotes *Death Wish* to ridicule it. 'RoboCop' is an officer of the law and before blowing criminals away he reads them their rights. He not only rescues a girl from two hoodlums but notes her anguish and assigns her to the local Rape Crisis Centre.

Eco noted that the charm of *Casablanca* was its intuitive use of cliché. ('When only a few of these formulas are used, the result is simply kitsch. But when the repertoire of stock formulas is used wholesale, then the result is an architecture like Gaudi's Sagrada Familia: the same vertigo, the same stroke of genius.') The effect of these new SF films lies very largely in their highly *non*-intuitive use of cinematic allusion.

This is not just a matter of incidental details. The magnificent design of *Blade Runner* transforms the symbolic mean streets of the private eye genre into a whole world: decayed, permanently rain-soaked, abandoned by all but the

poorest. *RoboCop* is similarly true to its genre. As in *Hill Street Blues*, the basic moral argument is pointed up by the gap between the cynical bureaucrat and the decent cop out on the street. But, far more than its predecessors, *RoboCop* works through a whole frame of reference, and it is this playfulness and intelligence that makes the film such fun. European directors like Verhoeven are even more intoxicated with the American movie heritage than their American counterparts. As RoboCop plods around Detroit rescuing the innocent, he is by turns a robotic Superman and a benign reincarnation of Schwarzenegger's 'terminator'. Later, as memories of Murphy's human existence start to filter through his programmed brain, he assumes the pathos (and many of the movements) of Karloff's version of Frankenstein's monster. And when he is forced into single combat with an earlier, far larger 'enforcement droid' we witness a clear tribute to the animation of *King Kong*.

RoboCop is a shrewdly enjoyable movie—enjoyable *because* of its shrewdness, a film of comic-book violence that is also a parody of comic-book violence. It's a sophisticated anthology of American archetypes that is made disconcerting by a European archetype hovering close behind: Lang's *Metropolis*, a society run as an industry, with its robot (on which RoboCop's design is clearly based) becoming an inhuman woman, foreshadowing *RoboCop*, where a man becomes a humane robot, superior to its makers. Where *RoboCop* disappoints is in its characterisation. *Alien* and *Blade Runner* were actors' as well as designers' films, but Verhoeven leaves little for his team to do. Nancy Allen makes a superb first appearance as a violent street cop, but is then left with almost nothing to do. And the villains are a pallid collection, hardly worthy of their armour-plated opponent.

These new SF films ritually attract ideological attack and it's worth registering how politically benign they are in comparison with other recent popular cycles (the intensely misogynous slasher cycle, the rabble-rousing vigilante cycle). *Aliens*, with its dominant females and its neurotically ineffectual males, could profitably be shown in female assertiveness classes. *RoboCop*'s script (by Edward Neumeier and Michael Miner) is remarkable for its political intelligence: it's a world of rundown inner cities as privatisation has gone mad (RoboCop pays a community visit to the children of Detroit's Lee Iacocca Elementary School—a nice touch), in which the war in Central America has spread to Mexico and an American SDI satellite has malfunctioned, attacking Southern California and killing three retired presidents.

Opinion will be divided by *RoboCop*, but it's a film far less worrying than the country it so tellingly comments on. □

A memory of Galway

The Dead/Tim Pulleine

The fact that John Huston's *The Dead* (Vestron) has emerged as a posthumous work cannot fail to colour a response to it. Yet the film does not appear to have been conceived as a testament; perhaps, indeed, the very idea of a testamentary work would have been alien to an old warhorse like Huston. As a close literary adaptation, on the other hand, scripted by Tony Huston, the director's son, from James Joyce's longish short story, *The Dead* clearly represents a continuation—in the event, a culmination—of one of its maker's abiding concerns: 'I try to be as faithful as I can to the material I have chosen to film.' We are in Dublin at the start of the new century. It is Twelfth Night, the Feast of the Epiphany, and sundry friends and relatives are arriving for the annual party given by the elderly Miss Morkans, retired maiden ladies. Here is Dublin's middle-class society—the mirror of Joyce's Ireland—contained by a somewhat self-conscious complacency.

The more artless of the younger ladies prefer the dance floor to introductions: the quadrille will warm them up after the night air. The solitary Protestant, Mr Browne (Dan O'Herlihy), and others among the menfolk down 'medicinal' drink: ritual jocularity. A domineering woman (Marie Kean) has, however, recently prevailed upon her dipsomaniac son Freddie (Donal Donnelly) to sign the pledge. If these early humorous scenes might appear to echo the work of that other honorary Irishman, John Ford, the actual effect is much more reined-in. And appropriately so, for what is at the heart of these sequences is unfulfilment.

Talk ranges over public affairs, even if politics—some disparaging mutterings about Parnell—surfaces only briefly before the hostesses exercise the right of veto. A current production of *La Bohème* is greeted with enthusiasm; religion comes up apropos a monastic order who sleep in their coffins—'Where's the logic in it?' enquires the phlegmatic Browne. Such preoccupations, however, are a smokescreen for an underlying sterility in the sphere of human affairs. As the servant girl Lily (Rachael Dowling) complains at the outset, any potential suitors are 'all palaver and what they can get out of you'. On one side is the gaucherie of the youngsters and the parody relationship between Freddie and his mother; on the other, the intimations of mortality in Julia Morkan's faltering voice as she sings her party-piece, 'Arrayed for the Bridal'.

There are, however, two exceptions to this sense of emptiness: the Miss Morkans' fortyish nephew, Gabriel Conroy (Donal McCann, whose performance stands out even in a film as uniformly well cast and played as this), and his slightly younger wife, Gretta (Anjelica Huston). And it is they, parents of two—unseen—children, who move to centre stage as, about an hour into an 82-minute film, the party comes to an end. A cab is summoned to take the Conroys to their hotel, though not without some initial difficulty. The cabman is a stand-in, unsure of his directions, who, in a line not to be found in Joyce, floridly informs Conroy: 'I was lost until

***The Dead*: Donal McCann (Gabriel) and Anjelica Huston (Gretta).**

your honour found me.' Briefly the action is opened out, with a striking high-angle view of the carriage traversing snowy streets. But once the hotel is reached, the focus is narrowed down to Conroy and Gretta, as the latter is suddenly overcome by the girlhood memory of a youthful admirer who literally died for love after leaving his sickbed in midwinter to snatch a parting glimpse of her.

In Huston's work romantic attachment has usually been something of a contradictory commodity, all the way from Charlie and Rose in *The African Queen* to the husband and wife in *Prizzi's Honor* whom circumstances manoeuvre into seeking to murder each other. The impossible non-relationship in Galway which Gretta recalls might perhaps be seen as the ultimate reduction of this tendency. Yet because it is so inexplicable (its abstraction underscored by the absence of a flashback), this romantic memory momentarily opens a door on an inner life besides which the rigmarole of social interchange pales to insignificance.

'On paper, all you can do is say something happened,' Huston once said. 'In pictures, if you do it right, the thing happens, right there on the screen.' And while the closing passage of this elusive, miniaturist film contains snatches of voiceover quotation from Joyce's story, these omit the philosophical meaning as perceived by Conroy ('He had never felt that himself toward any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love') in favour of descriptive phrases ('Snow was general all over Ireland . . .') which summon up images of that oblivious reality of the natural world, against which, ever since the gold-seekers of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, Huston's characters have recurrently pitted themselves. It is not so much the director's death, at the age of 81, as the awareness of his rigorously self-effacing technique which prompts the feeling that what is happening in this instance 'right there' on screen is what Joyce was pleased to call 'the swooning of a soul'. □

At the club

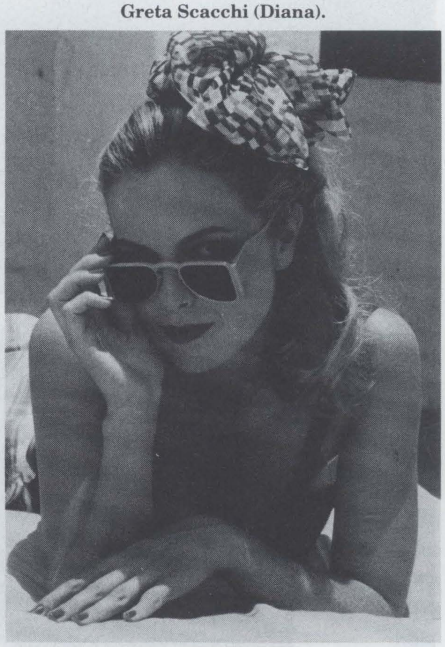
White Mischief/Claire Tomalin

Early in *White Mischief* (Columbia Pictures), Jack Soames (played by Trevor Howard), a typical British settler in Kenya's Happy Valley, wriggles into a cupboard after bidding his guests goodnight, in order to spy on them in the bathroom through a specially constructed peephole. He is rewarded with the sight of his old chum's new bride, Lady Broughton (Greta Scacchi), taking a bath in her pearls. Soames loves it, and cinema audiences will probably love it too. Scacchi is beautiful and seductive, with that mixture of blonde childishness and rounded adult allure that makes a supreme pin-up. She's also a fine actress, although lying in a bath in pearls places a minimal strain on her talents.

There is not much else in this film to test her powers. It's almost as though her good looks got in the way of what it might have been. She fires a gun, dances and drinks at the club, rides several horses and goes swimming, stripping off her 1940 one-piece bathing suit slowly in front of another dazzled admirer. Her jewels, hats and dresses are ravishing; even blood spatters, violently acquired, take on a Vogueish chic on her silk shirt. Her lovely face registers greed, petulance, fear and grief, but essentially her role is to evoke lust in all the men she meets and envy in all the women.

Diana Broughton—who was a real person—is the catalyst in a plot of which the crucial elements are money, marriage contracts and guns. As the film opens, she appears as a gold-digger who knew her own value and seemed to have hit on the right husband in 1940, with a fortune, a title and a ticket out of the war. Sir 'Jock' Delves Broughton (an impeccably polished performance by Joss Ackland) is an English sporting landowner. He recalls, without any sense of irony, that his biggest spending year had been 1926 (as the General Strike took place). He is thirty years older than Diana and prepared to tolerate her 'amusing herself' with younger men. Keen to escape the hardships of wartime England, and troubled about his dwindling supply of ready money, he bears her off to his estates in Kenya.

Greta Scacchi (Diana).



The people among whom he introduces her are culled from the British playboy aristocracy and its hangers-on. For this group Diana is, as one of its members remarks, a welcome piece of fresh meat. The film is at some pains to contrast these white colonials with the noble landscape they have commandeered, and the beautiful and unspoiled native people, the Masai. We are shown random sex-swapping, drug-taking, much foul language from the ladies, transvestite parties, cocktails in a cemetery (what fun!), and a scene round a mortuary slab in which one of a dead man's mistresses smears her vaginal secretions over his cold face to establish her pre-eminence. Dignified black servants watch in mostly baffled silence. Any or all of this may shock or titillate us in the audience, but it never leaves the realm of trivial naughtiness, as though a nursery of spoilt, bored children were setting out to embarrass nanny. (Come to think of it, that is about the measure of it.)

The material for *White Mischief* is drawn by the director Michael Radford and co-writer Jonathan Gems from James Fox's well-researched and elegantly gossipy book. He set out to solve a mystery which had earlier intrigued Cyril Connolly: who shot Diana Broughton's lover—a crime of which no one was found guilty. Part of what's wrong with the film is that it believes it has the solution, but then cannot make up its mind what it is trying to do with it. Is it a detective story with an exotic setting? Or a love story into which violence intrudes? Or a morality tale about colonials? In practice it veers from one viewpoint to another. It has fine camerawork by Roger Deakins, some sterling performances and touches of wit, but it founders on this uncertainty of aim.

Perhaps it's understandable that no one wanted to show the delectable Scacchi as the cold-hearted, mercenary bitch Diana Broughton obviously was. Her affair with Joss Erroll, an impoverished Scottish aristocrat and the stud of the Happy Valley, is tricked out as a grand passion. Erroll is played by Charles Dance, who looks slightly bemused as long as he's alive (and magnificent dead). Swelling music (George Fenton's) accompanies their romance, but the dialogue plods dully below the crescendoing strings. 'I want to make love to you,' Erroll tells Diana during their second (I think) turn round the club dance floor. Later, he announces that he is tired of his 'rather shoddy life': 'I want you to save me from myself.'

Everything is better when Joss Ackland is on screen. He is entirely credible as the pebbly-eyed Broughton: three-piece suits and ties in all temperatures, always courteous to members of his own

class, addressing his wife with a mixture of condescension and suppliance, as though she were a tiny child with lethal powers, who must be kept amused at all costs lest she exert them. Broughton is a credit to his background; sober or drunk, he is acceptable to his peers; yet beneath all this grooming and manner, he may also be slightly mad. He gets the best lines in the script, too. When he is in prison, on trial for murder, he is visited by his old friend Soames (the one with the peephole), who brings him a box of chocolates with a fatal dose concealed at the bottom, just in case he should want a way out. Soames assures him, however, that no jury in Africa will find an English gentleman guilty of murder. All Broughton wants to know is 'What are they saying about me at the club?'

No one can understand this particular brand of English gentleman who does not see the importance of the club. Wife-pinching, gold-digging and murder are as nothing, as long as you do not contravene the unwritten rules of the club. If *White Mischief* had concentrated on this aspect of the story instead of indulging itself in other directions, it could have been a tougher, wickeder and possibly better film. Still, it has its redeeming points; not least among them are Sarah Miles and Susan Fleetwood playing two of the club's most formidable ladies with terrific aplomb. □

Military honours

Gardens of Stone/Tom Milne

The recent revisionist move to restore America's battered military pride continues apace in Francis Coppola's *Gardens of Stone* (Columbia Pictures), where James Caan's battle-seasoned veteran, back from Vietnam to become sergeant in charge of the spit-and-polish brigade at Arlington National Cemetery, is desperately trying to work a transfer so that he can instead teach the new intakes of cannon fodder what he has learned of the arts of survival. The year is 1968; the body count of candidates for burial with full military honours has risen to 15 a day; and the film's circular structure, beginning with one funeral ceremony and ending with another, seems less an invitation to anger than to stoic acceptance of the tragic loss of life. Certainly no irony is evident as each grieving widow in turn is presented with the flag from the coffin and a parroted formula: 'On behalf of the President of the United States, please accept this flag in recognition of your loved one's faithful service.'

Not that Coppola recants *Apocalypse Now* and its vision of madness and horror. Rather the contrary, since Caan's Clell Hazard and Martin Sheen's Captain Willard are presented pretty much as two of a kind. Both have survived two tours of Vietnam; both have suffered the marital alienation laconically described in Willard's account of his homecoming on leave ('I hardly said a word to my wife until I said yes to a divorce'); and Hazard, refusing to return for a third tour, openly acknowledges what Willard only belatedly realises: 'In this war there is no front. It's not even a war. There's nothing to win and no way to win it.' Neither hawk nor dove, Hazard is a walking compromise demonstrating that extremist views of either hue on the subject of war and the military rarely paint the whole picture. Just as some wars are more justified than others, some soldiers are less than regimental machines.

Fair enough, except that Nicholas Proffitt, author of the novel on which the script is based and himself an army brat, has said that part of his purpose in writing it was 'because I didn't like the image of the non-commissioned officer. I wanted to redress the balance.' The film responds by shaping Caan to the WWII John Wayne mould exemplified by a film like *Sands of Iwo Jima* (Allan Dwan, 1949) where, battered through training by a tough sergeant, the raw recruits eventually learn in combat to love the man they hated. Anachronistic in the Vietnam context, at least without further elaboration, the characterisation might have worked to the extent that it does in Clint Eastwood's recent *Heartbreak Ridge*. But *Gardens of Stone* has only just started on its rehabilitation programme.

At the outset, left something of a loner by the departure of his wife with their son, Hazard does have a bosom buddy, a sergeant whose bark is as bluffly genial as his own (James Earl Jones) and who also happens to be black (one up for liberal values). Then he meets Anjelica Huston, a *Washington Post* reporter and committed peace activist, so muted in her stance that when love blossoms between them, she comfortably bridges the ideological gap: 'You've got your job to do, I've got mine.' Finally there is Jackie Willow (D. B. Sweeney), the recruit eager to get to Vietnam (once there, he soon learns), who happens to be the son of a former NCO buddy of Hazard's and whom he takes under his wing as a surrogate son. The nuclear family thus assembled, and celebrated in a small-scale re-run of the wedding reception from *The Godfather*, seems intended to represent an American ideal. Here all shades of skin are equal, all tenets of belief are worthy of respect, and even that old bugbear of class gets its comeuppance when Willow marries the daughter of a general despite the social stumbling-block posed by his NCO ancestry.

Not unpredictably, it is Willow whose funeral is celebrated in the closing scene, recapitulating the more anonymous note of mourning from the opening in terms of a family's private grief. Impeccably performed by a superlative cast, directed throughout with style and sensitivity, it would all be rather moving—rather as Capracorn used to tug at the heart against its better judgment—were it not just too contrived. Functioning like a well-made play, with the bare bones of its special pleading showing all too clearly, *Gardens of Stone* seems somehow abject in its careful pussyfooting through the already charted reefs of Vietnam. □

***Gardens of Stone*: James Earl Jones (Sergeant Major Nelson).**

Orson again

THE BIG BRASS RING: AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY
by Orson Welles with Oja Kodar
Afterword by Jonathan Rosenbaum
Santa Teresa Press/$25

The Big Brass Ring is a script which Orson Welles wrote in 1982. Then with the help of Henry Jaglom he tried to find backers. One might reasonably suspect that bringing Welles and Jaglom together to finance a movie is like bringing Laurel and Hardy together to deliver a piano. Needless to say, the film never got made. Somehow, though, that seems appropriate to this reflective, autumnal work whose whole subject is the willed, deliberate failure of which Welles was such a master.

Orson Welles achieved success so quickly and so easily that it is scarcely surprising he became more interested in failure. It's the quality that his heroes share, from Kane through Harry Lime and Quinlan to Sir John Falstaff. They all embrace failure and, like Kane in the face of Boss Jim Gettys' blackmail threats, they decide that if you are to destroy yourself it must be in a cataclysmic style.

The same is true of the films themselves. No other director is as well known for the struggles behind the screen. *Kane*, of course, was almost destroyed before release. *The Magnificent Ambersons* was brutally cut by the studio. The rest of his films are like tattered ancient manuscripts that only fitfully, and in varying degrees, communicate the original poetic vision. But by force of will Welles somehow manages to make a virtue out of adversity which gives the films an exciting, provisional quality.

Welles' career is often, and I think quite wrongly, seen in gloomy terms. He took on the cinema, as he had already taken on the theatre and radio, with the gusto of one of the great nineteenth-century actor-managers. He conceived, wrote and in the end even financed his own films. He progressed through the 50s, 60s and 70s like his own Jack Falstaff, begging, borrowing and earning funds, which he then ploughed back into his own films. He left behind him a trail of projects in varying stages of completion: some finished and released, others partly shot and edited, some shot but unprocessed, some frozen in byzantine legal proceedings, some existing only as stories or scripts.

Even his completed films had flaws that would have destroyed lesser work. By any rational standards, *Chimes at Midnight* would be judged unreleasable, so appalling is the post-synchronised sound. Yet, despite the gross liberties it takes with the texts of *Henry IV*, parts one and two, and *Henry V*, it somehow remains the most magical version of Shakespeare ever filmed.

Some of Welles' projects, like *Don Quixote*, were so unconventional that they would have been virtually impossible to complete, let alone release commercially. But the purpose behind *The Big Brass Ring* was quite different. According to Jonathan Rosenbaum's afterword accompanying this script, Jaglom 'suggested that Welles write something more commercial and contemporary—an original script which could entice producers.'

Welles obliged but he could never resist being mischievous. At the beginning of his career he bit the hands that fed him; at the end he bit the hands that didn't feed him. *The Big Brass Ring* has all the ingredients of a commercial project: its characters are rich, glamorous people; the locations are yachts, grand hotels and elegant restaurants; the subjects of the plot are a stolen necklace and a suitcase full of money; there is a graphic sex scene (Welles impishly observes that 'The action must be given in synopsis . . . The climax of this sequence is strongly erotic: to spell out its specific details would be to risk pornography'); the principal motivating forces are the search for love and power. Even the characters' names seem designed to be almost ludicrously commercial: Blake Pellarin, Cela Brandini, Garner Strickland, Dr Kimball Menaker, Dinty Benart. But beneath the superficial gloss, this story is as strange and personal as any of his work.

The hero is Blake Pellarin, a Democratic presidential candidate who has just lost to Ronald Reagan. Before embarking on the long road to the White House in the following election, he purloins his wife's priceless emerald necklace and heads off on a whim to find his old mentor, Kimball Menaker, who is playing a murky role in an African dictatorship. As some CIA men try to track them down, Pellarin and Menaker make for Spain where they try to sell the necklace. Meanwhile—the plot is highly convoluted—an attractive female journalist investigates the shady connection between Pellarin and Menaker, discovering that Menaker has nurtured a secret homosexual passion for his protégé. In the end, in a random act of violence, Pellarin seems to have thrown his political career away.

While reading this one keeps trying to picture it as a film. This is not always easy: it doesn't begin to come together as a story. More profitable, perhaps, is to see it not as a script but as a sort of meditation, a final dream sequence in the mind of one of the cinema's great visionaries. This script is crammed with references to earlier Welles projects. The initial search for Menaker is clearly a comic reworking of *Heart of Darkness*, an early Welles idea that never got made, with a couple of sly references to *Apocalypse Now*, the version of the work that *did* get made. Pellarin and Menaker are the latest incarnation of the Quixote-Sancho Panza relationship that haunts Welles' work (Menaker was to be played by Welles). But in this case the lament for the age of chivalry is explicit in a song the two men recall from their Harvard days.

The script is full of moments that suggest earlier Welles films like *Touch of Evil* or *The Third Man*. The form of a journalistic inquiry and the subject of a bid for the presidency halted by private scandal inescapably recall *Citizen Kane*. And if *Kane* can be seen as an anticipatory autobiography, then perhaps *The Big Brass Ring* can best be judged as a retrospective apologia. Blake Pellarin is a man who, like Welles, has achieved worldly success, but in the end he cannot take it seriously enough to make it to the top. He's a Galahad who wants to be a Quixote, embarking on whimsical quests in the service of a fantasy of a woman. This is about the retreat from success, and proved also to be—as Welles' life and works ironically clashed once again—a retreat from cinema.

Anyone who blames Welles' failure entirely on the cruel old Hollywood studio system should consider the fate of *The Big Brass Ring*. It was decided that a major actor for Pellarin was a sine qua non. Eastwood, Newman, Redford and Reynolds turned the project down for different reasons. Jack Nicholson, that product of the Hollywood counter-culture, decided that two million dollars was not enough. Beatty would only accept if he was made producer and given final cut, which Welles could not accept. So he chose to make *Ishtar*, a film which lost more money than the budgets of all Welles' films put together. The conclusion seems inescapable that if Welles were 25 today, he would not even be allowed to make *Kane*. As Charles Foster Kane himself put it, I think Welles did pretty well under the circumstances.

SEAN FRENCH

Kings Row

'RONALD REAGAN', THE MOVIE
by Michael Rogin
University of California Press/
£15.70

Perhaps the first thing to be remarked about *'Ronald Reagan', the Movie*, one of the most densely argued film books to appear for some time—in fact, several books compacted in one, not all to do with film—is its use of stills. These come at the end of selected chapters, and thus look like conventional illustration compared, say, to those intellectually 'weighty' coffee-table books which do lavish homage to the visual by grouping stills in terms of certain recurring motifs in a director's work. To examine the making of the president in the roles he has played, Michael Rogin's choice of stills from Ronald Reagan movies—*Dark Victory*, *King's Row*, *Hellcats of the Navy*—is quite simply and serviceably linked to his text. Where he begins to show more appreciation for the visual, and for making his own eccentric thematic connections, is when he moves away from film.

Three images of Abraham Lincoln, for instance, before, during and after the Civil War, demonstrate through the varying length of his beard how he conceived of himself and his office: from 'Calvinist avenger' to 'saintly Father Abraham' to 'a man at peace with himself . . . ready for his sacrifice.' In fact, there is one such pictorial link, between the book's cover picture and its final illustration, which beats the new 'compare and contrast' school of film-book illustration at its own game, and which exemplifies the wealth of material, interlocking theories of politics, psychoanalysis and film, that Rogin has squeezed between them.

The cover is a scene from the 1984 Republican convention and shows Nancy Reagan, a tiny figure on the podium, with her arms raised to a large screen above her; there her husband, watching the convention on television in his hotel room, has himself been televised in huge head-and-shoulders shot, and waves back at her, the convention audience and himself. The final picture in the text is a detail from the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and shows his ideal ruler, in huge head-to-waist shot, presiding over a Lilliputian landscape, with his body actually composed of the tiny figures of his subjects. They all gaze towards the giant

The Reagans in *Hellcats of the Navy*.

crowned head, as if watching a spectacle they are simultaneously absorbed in. They both 'make up' and have 'made up' their ruler, though the power he acquires by this transaction seems real enough, to judge by the sword he wields.

Hobbes, whom Rogin calls 'the first modern political theorist', sought to establish the authority of this sovereign on the basis of consent, and to show, through metaphors about actors and disguise, how citizens are bound by the authority of this fictive being they have in a sense authorised. It's a small leap visually, and not too great a one historically, from this to the actor-president, who is an inveterate movie-quoter in his speeches ('Make my day', 'The force is with us'), who has merged his on-screen and off-screen selves, and who has used 'his confusion between "day-dreams" and reality to mediate between the mass public and the image of the ideal.'

Talk of splitting and projecting, identifying and merging, is by its nature movie talk. It is both Rogin's good fortune to have found in the current president a focus for a discussion of American political history in these terms, and a tribute to his intellectual depth and reach to have made this perspective hold over such a broad range of topics. Of the book's nine chapters, only three are strictly concerned with cinema: the first, a psychoanalytic account of Reagan's movie career, which analyses what was at stake for him in the creation of this second persona; a close reading of *The Birth of a Nation*, and the racist imagery in this founding moment of American cinema, that exemplifies another kind of splitting and gives Rogin his central theme, the counter-subversive or demonological trend in American political thinking; and a discussion of the Cold War movies of the 50s whose ideology Reagan brought to the White House.

Of the others, perhaps the most fascinating is the one entitled 'The King's Two Bodies', which involves neither Reagan nor the movies but which throws up an image, spanning the careers of three presidents over a hundred years, that would have lent itself ideally to a set of 'compare and contrast' stills. This is the image of a locomotive, the one that carried Lincoln's body on a twelve-day funeral procession through the northern USA; the one on which Woodrow Wilson was travelling, campaigning on behalf of the League of Nations, when he suffered his fatal stroke; and the one invoked by Richard Nixon when he talked of his youthful dream to be a railroad engineer. All three made the mystic identification of the king's own body with the 'body politic', all took on powers that contravened the principle of a 'government of laws and not of men' in the cause of some greater transformation (enacted in three unpopular wars), and all three offered themselves up as sacrifices for this hubris. Lincoln most clearly made it to the role of Christ-like saviour of the nation (hence the gradations in his beard); Wilson died with his transcendental dream of world peace defeated; and Nixon, who made a fetish of secrecy and surveillance, ensured his own martyrdom by preserving his dirty secrets on the Watergate tapes.

What this chapter deals with is the split between a nation founded on law and the periodic religious impulse of its leaders to redeem and renew the founders' promise by overturning their constitution. Another split, traced through the book, also begins with that founding dream of a nation of 'liberal' (bourgeois, propertied) men whose relations would be governed by contract rather than coercion. The split then develops from the prospect of an uncivilised, unliberated 'other', against which these liberal men define themselves even as they fear the same uncivilised impulses within themselves. This is the nation's 'demonological' politics—from expansion against the Indians to suppression of the blacks and repression of a host of dissident, radical, alien or Communist influences from the late nineteenth century to the present.

What distinguishes Ronald Reagan from other demonological politicians is precisely his movie career—the fact that he feels no threatening kinship with his demon 'other' because he has embodied and distanced him on the screen. He has, in a real sense, amputated that part of himself. In his account of *The Birth of a Nation* or *Hellcats of the Navy*, Rogin proves as astute a critic of cinema as of history. But his most irresistible bit of analysis is of the way Reagan dealt with his own unsatisfactory past and family history in his favourite movie role. 'How, if your father is a failed shoe salesman, do you avoid stepping into his shoes? The answer *King's Row* provided was this: by cutting off your legs.'

RICHARD COMBS

Missing years

FASCISM IN FILM: THE ITALIAN COMMERCIAL CINEMA, 1931-1943
by Marcia Landy
Princeton University Press/ $47.50

POPULAR FILM CULTURE IN FASCIST ITALY: THE PASSING OF THE REX
by James Hay
Indiana University Press/ $37.50. Paper $14.95

If the history of the cinema could be divided into quarter-centuries, then the first quarter (up to, say, the end of the First World War) would be one in which the Italian cinema, in the form of comedies, melodramas and spectaculars, plays a prominent role. It is even more prominent in the third quarter-century—from the end of the Second World War to 1970, the years of *Bicycle Thieves*, *Journey to Italy* and *L'avventura*. But it is strangely absent from the intervening quarter, the years which, elsewhere in the world, produced *Potemkin*, *Sunrise*, *Blackmail*, *Story of the Late Chrysanthemums*, *La Règle du jeu*, *Citizen Kane* . . .

These were difficult years the world over, except where national cinemas found ways of insulating or protecting themselves from the overwhelming competition of Hollywood, but in Italy the situation was aggravated because these were also the years of Fascism, which came to power in 1922 and was overthrown only in 1943. It is not just that Fascism had a generally deadening effect on cultural life (it was a good time for writing poems and publishing them in limited editions, but not for making movies), but that the overthrow of the regime was followed by a widespread desire to forget the immediate past. As a result of that comprehensible desire the modest but real achievements of the Italian cinema in the Fascist period have been shrouded in oblivion.

The phrase 'Italian cinema in the Fascist period' (rather than 'Fascist cinema' or even 'Italian cinema under Fascism') is used advisedly. For it has become clear, now that scholars have finally got round to evaluating what is left of the commercial cinema of those years (about half the sound features of the period are lost, probably irretrievably), that the Italian cinema, unlike the German, was never completely 'fascistised'. Newsreels were used as vehicles of the regime's self-glorification, but the attempts of committed intellectuals such as Alessandro Blasetti to endow the entertainment film with Fascist content and ideology were viewed by the regime with diffidence to say the least. In so far as the regime had a policy towards the cinema it was largely a commercial one, aimed at protecting the industry from foreign (i.e. Hollywood) competition. The main requirement was for films to be entertaining and attract audiences. It was also advisable for filmmakers to avoid provoking the censors and to produce films which were decent, patriotic and positive, but a lot of films got through which weren't.

Two books on the subject have now come out in English. Both are American. Of the two, Marcia Landy's *Fascism in Film* is the more straightforward. The author describes a large number of films, many of them extremely rare, grouped according to genre and (more suggestively) theme. The three genres she looks at had all been pioneered in the silent period and were to surface again in the 1950s—comedy, melo- or family drama, and costume/historical pictures. The almost unbroken continuity of these genres from the earliest years to the present is remarkable and deserves further exploration. The themes she isolates are childhood, woman and the family, and the male hero. The conclusions she reaches are suggestive but problematical. Although the films she has selected undoubtedly have certain things in common, it is not at all clear of what they are supposed to be representative.

Are their generally conservative values typical of the cinema? of Italy? of Fascism? The author seems to assume that the films, being made in the Fascist period, are somehow representative of Fascism, but why should this be so? If one were to group together some films from the period of the postwar British Labour government with children in them—let's say *The Mudlark*, *Great Expectations* and *The Fallen Idol*—one could not really go on from there to derive conclusions about social-democratic ideologies of childhood. So why should it be possible

with Fascism? The answer usually given is that Fascism was a totalitarian regime whose effects were felt in every area of social life. This is questionable, and even if it were true one would need to know how the regime succeeded in producing these effects—by police-state methods or through persuasion and consent. Regrettably, *Fascism in Film*, despite its title, does nothing to answer these questions.

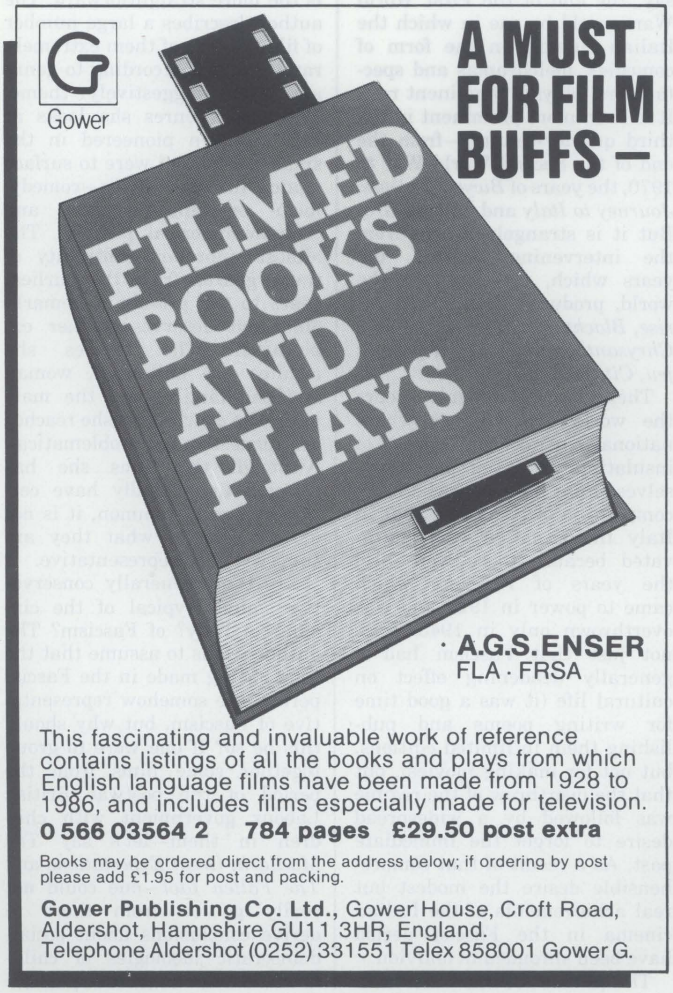
Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy, however, does consider the questions, and comes up with some intriguing answers. James Hay is as interested in the audiences for cinema as he is in the films they watched. His concern is culture, and the ideas that people could form through their watching of both Italian and American films in the 1930s. His basic thesis is that people had their own ways of appropriating films and making them mean what they wanted them to mean, and that the film industry had to learn to make films for an audience that enjoyed and made use of this sovereign discretion.

Hay is particularly informative on the reception of American films in Italy. American films made up approximately half of the box office throughout the period (more or less depending on the degree of protectionism in force at any given time), but they were censored, changed in the dubbing and packaged by the distributors to make them more domesticated. Italian films, for their part, were imitative of Hollywood models. This combination meant that audiences, particularly in the cities, could mentally disport themselves in a peculiar cosmopolitan half-world very remote from the drab realities of life in the Depression.

Hay perhaps does not make enough of this contrast, since his picture of 30s Italy is of a country far more effectively modernised than it in fact was. Italy at the time was predominantly rural (and remained so until the 60s) and many city-dwellers were poor and unemployed. 'Modernisation' affected (for good or ill) only relatively small segments of the population, though these were probably the privileged recipients of the flood of films which Hay analyses about the stresses and strains of sophisticated modern life.

Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy is not a particularly easy book to read but it does uniquely bring to life a curious corner of film history. Few great films were produced in Italy in the period (the nearest to a masterpiece being Max Ophuls' *La signora di tutti*), but film culture was extraordinarily alive, precisely because it was cosmopolitan and official national culture was in a state of deathly quiescence. It is good to have that culture recreated with such scrupulousness and enthusiasm.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH



This fascinating and invaluable work of reference contains listings of all the books and plays from which English language films have been made from 1928 to 1986, and includes films especially made for television.

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Documenting

LE DOCUMENTAIRE FRANCAIS

edited by René Prédal

CinémAction 41, Editions du Cerf/114FF

Documentary film-making in France has a long tradition of excellence. Indeed, the very beginnings of cinema, Auguste Lumière's one-reel portraits of the world around him, were also the very beginnings of this tradition. But fiction has marked the history of cinema as its most popular form, and the custom now, as René Prédal here points out, is to consider documentaries as celluloid calling-cards, run off and deposited by aspirant directors of features. The CinémAction dossier on French documentary sets out to counter this derisory reduction. Rather than concentrate on the formidable heritage of the modern French documentary director, Prédal has assembled 32 articles which focus on issues of permanent relevance to documentary—the complexity of its aesthetics and the economics of its survival.

Much space is devoted to speculation about the very nature of documentary. The formal organisation of the Real and the positioning of the spectator are topics returned to with regularity and relish. In '*La Réalité en Question*', Gérard Leblanc denounces the *direct* cinema of the 60s, arguing that the bogus self-effacement of such fly-on-the-wall technique creates a pernicious 'myth of transparency' which masks the presence of a determining director and somewhat naively reduces reality to its external manifestations.

Happily, many of the formal reflections have an empirical basis. Works considered include *documentaires d'auteur* of the 50s by Resnais and Franju, the *cinéma direct* and *cinéma militant* of the 60s and 70s, and the epistolary works of Chris Marker and others. Films at the frontier of documentary and other types of film-making stimulate thoughts on the nature of documentary. Gérard Courant's 700 *Cinématons*, for example. Each is a 3 minute 20 seconds (the standard length of a Super-8 reel) static shot of a personality associated with the Arts. The subject chooses where and when to be filmed and is shot in a close-up which reveals nothing of his/her activity (Jean-Luc Godard was apparently signing a contract). Jacques Kermabon's essay contemplates how Courant's 'film(s)' challenge the outer limits of the genre by being at once minimalist, anti-narrative *degré zéro du cinéma* documents in the manner of Lumière, and portraits of subjects whose steady stare into camera creates the feeling of the insistent point of view, as decreed by Vigo and Grierson.

The dossier is not, however, exclusively devoted to matters of ontology. It also has an engaged, hard-edged side, reflecting the fact that René Prédal, like other contributors, is a film-maker himself as well as a respected critic. Two essays by Prédal, for example, raise economic issues pertinent to the very existence of documentary in France: the first considers how the origins of the financing of a documentary often determine the film's meaning and how the most creative film-makers can subvert the meaning prescribed by the investors (as in the case of Franju's *Hôtel des Invalides*); the second examines the state aid available to French documentary film-makers.

But although the dossier is stimulating and lively (there are interviews with practising film-makers and festival organisers), it is somewhat spare on the history of French documentary. In the early 1950s, makers of short films, including documentary film-makers, formed a *Groupe des Trente* which strenuously defended the short film and demanded a more favourable system of state assistance. Alongside Resnais, Franju, Georges Rouquier and Jean Painlevé, many lesser known film-makers joined forces, including Henri Fabiani, Robert Ménégoz, Paul Paviot and Edmond Séchan. Georges Sadoul, the communist film historian, has written in praise of these film-makers, comparing the range and quality of their output to that of the GPO and EMB film units. But Prédal fails to mention the *Groupe* and a chapter of French documentary history is thus passed by.

The CinémAction dossier amounts to a vigorous 'defence and illustration' of the documentary form and is always challenging and gratifying for this reason. But to consolidate the contributors' optimism, a critical, historical survey is now needed to ensure that the rich French tradition remains as conspicuous today as the work of the British documentary directors of the 1930s and 40s.

RICHARD ALWYN

Euro titling

SIR,—Having read John Minchinton's lengthy article (Autumn 1987), perhaps I may be allowed to present a slightly different point of view.

I, too, was part of the British group at both the Hilversum workshop and Stockholm conference on television subtitling. Both conferences had a common theme, 'Overcoming the Language Barriers of Europe' so that there might be a greater interchange of television programmes between the countries of Europe—not just the EEC—rather than have Europe swamped by North American programmes during the coming years of satellite and cable. They were not simply about how to do subtitling but were a means whereby practical subtitlers (and dubbers) throughout European television might meet and exchange ideas and techniques. As one leading EBU spokesman put it: Viewers in Europe know more about the Streets of San Francisco than they do of the streets of Frankfurt or Birmingham.

Some of the countries represented have been subtitling television programmes for many years with modern electronic and older mechanical systems, so they are certainly not new to it. They showed that there is not just one 'classic' method which is right and therefore by definition every other way is wrong. Also, with many television programmes a 'spotting' list simply does not exist and production and editing style mean that picture cuts which break up the flow of speech may have to be ignored, or at least not treated with obsessive reverence. If you are having to subtitle most of your transmission output in a country where the production capacity in your own language is naturally small, you need to adopt a subtitling method and style which is more efficient than that used by British television for its rather limited transmission time of foreign feature films. If you have to subtitle *all* imported films, drama, documentaries, soap operas and sitcoms for the mass audience of viewers, you have to take into account the reading speed of the majority.

Perhaps British television is limiting its audience for subtitled programmes by showing subtitles which are too fast for many viewers. Perhaps older, intelligent but maybe slower readers just switch off with disappointment, not realising that subtitling could be done differently to enable them to read it in a more relaxed manner. Perhaps they don't complain in case this suggests they are semi-literate; so much of British subtitling stays the same for ever.

It was I at the Hilversum workshop who said that we could not successfully use most cinema subtitling lists for films on video and I was greeted by a chorus of agreement from our Continental colleagues. They were *not* heads of department but practical subtitlers who work full-time for their own audience.

In my view the number of subtitles used for a cinema version of a film does not normally suit the television or video cassette version of the same movie. My own company has subtitled a large number of feature films for overseas, particularly Latin America, and for this audience we adopt the 'European style' of subtitling and use the European method of timing the subtitles. Our average number of subtitles for a 90-minute feature film is about 600.

Where we are given an existing cinema list to use, there are too many subtitles and they are too fast. A film we are subtitling at the moment into Latin American Spanish has a cinema list of 1,495 subtitles in 100 minutes and we will reduce this to about 800 for the video version, without losing any relevant text. I would mention, however, that John Minchinton's own film subtitle lists, which we have used on a number of occasions, are always excellent for video so perhaps he is just better than most, as are maybe the films he works on.

Personally, I am all for the Continental and Scandinavian subtitling methods for the whole European audience. If we wish to carry a large volume of foreign language programmes—not just feature films—on television, satellite and cable services, we shall have to adopt the European television subtitling methods and style. Otherwise it simply cannot be done in the time and for the money available.

Yours faithfully,
DENNIS PACKHAM
Screentext
London N1

Spiegel and Pinter

SIR,—Andrew Sinclair's description of my working relationship with Sam Spiegel (Autumn 1987) is inaccurate. He asserts that I spent 'nearly two years' on the screenplays of *The Last Tycoon* and *Betrayal* and implies that Sam Spiegel was a slave driver 'demanding rewrite after rewrite'. I'd like to set the record straight.

I worked on each screenplay over a period of fifteen months, but by no means exclusively. (In both cases, by the way, the director changed midway through the operation, entailing a fresh start.) During both periods I was involved in a number of other projects. During the writing of *The Last Tycoon* (1974/75) I directed John Hopkins' *Next of Kin* for the National Theatre at the Old Vic and wrote a full length play, *No Man's Land*. During the writing of *Betrayal* (1980/81) I wrote a short play, *Family Voices*, directed my play *The Hothouse* for BBC Television and Simon Gray's *Quartermaine's Terms* in the West End.

Sam Spiegel did not 'demand rewrite after rewrite' etc. All decisions were taken by mutual agreement. I did not 'resent' his intelligence. Nor did he resent mine. We had a tough, open and active working relationship, which is good to remember.

Yours faithfully,
HAROLD PINTER
London W8

SIR,—As Sam Spiegel's biographer, Andrew Sinclair should know that *On the Waterfront* was not the producer's last film made in America for a decade.

In 1957 Spiegel was producer of *The Strange One* directed by Jack Garfein, and written by Calder Willingham from his novel *End as a Man*, under which title the film was released in the UK. Thirty years ahead of Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Strange One* demonstrated a regular Spiegel theme: rampant male despotism amid military establishments.

Yours faithfully,
TONY BOYLE
Newcastle upon Tyne

Videophobia

SIR,—Paolo Cherchi Usai (Summer 1987) is right that film and video are not the same thing, of course; but then neither is seeing a film on video and not seeing it at all, which from a practical standpoint is the more likely choice for people in all but a couple of dozen major cities. Granted that wrongly framed or scanned films are bastardisations of the original, and that there is no comparison between the experience of seeing, say, *2001* in 70mm and *2001* on a 16" Sylvania, I still think overall that the differences between video and film are of less consequence than they are made out to be.

Usai cites a technician's claim that one difference lies in the fact that the eye receives a film frame all at once, but a video image is seen one electron (or dot) at a time, as the 'gun' sprays across the screen. As this

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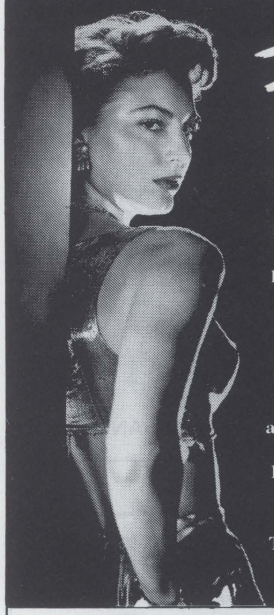

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LETTERS

happens every 400,000th of a second, it's not something one can easily test or dispute. Yet many who have seen Doug Trumbull's Showscan process (which is 70mm film projected at 60 fps) at international expos have reported that it has a 'video' look; so the difference in the viewer's eye may have less to do with electrons vs. emulsion than with 24 fps vs. higher frame rates.

Current TV standards are plainly substandard, especially in the US. But the advent of high definition television means that ultimately (perhaps as rapidly as videocassettes or compact discs entered wide distribution) we will have a means by which we can pop a cassette or disc into a machine and view a big screen, crystal-clear and stereophonic version of *Barry Lyndon* or *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, at the precise proportions its makers intended. And I think it inevitable that some electronic method (as far beyond today's 'video' as digital recording is beyond the gramophone) will be used for every step of film-making and exhibition.

The advantages—once the visual quality is truly as good as film's is today—are innumerable. Already we see the advantages of a world in which your choice for tonight's viewing is not the ten or twenty films in local theatres but the four hundred on your video dealer's shelf. Colour will never fade on a digitally-encoded film. More foreign films will come into distribution because subtitling will be cheaper without the need for internegatives and prints. And who would not trade our heritage of many lost and a few precious restored films for one in which everything is on file somewhere, in perfect condition, on a disk?

While the difference between hearing a recording on a tinny transistor radio and on a good hi-fi set is enormous, compact disk technology is such that the difference between a $95 CD player and a $1000 one is mainly apparent only if you drop them; the audio circuitry is very nearly uniform, only the features and the workmanship vary significantly. I would guess that future digital video technology will be similarly uniform—at least as long as a TV set is properly adjusted. To answer one of Usai's (and Kubrick's, Lucas', Lynch's, etc) prime concerns, digital video technology will be an auteur's dream if its inflexibility means a home viewer virtually *can't* ruin a showing of a film the way a projectionist can.

To return to my original point, when I think of the films that I've seen recently only because they were on videocassette or shown uninterrupted on cable TV—*Desert Hearts*, *Smooth Talk*, *Coup de Torchon*, *Man of Flowers*, *Insignificance*, *Paisan*, the uncut *Colonel Blimp*, and so on—there is no doubt in my mind, first, that it was better to have seen them imperfectly than not at all, and secondly, that what I saw was different only in fairly minor ways from what others saw in theatres. Videophobia, even when it is as thoughtful and sincere as Usai's, is not warranted and will be increasingly less so as technology advances.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL GEBERT
Wichita
Kansas

Gramsci and the Left

SIR,—Derek Malcolm's Edinburgh Film Festival review (Autumn 1987) of the film *Gramsci—Everything That Concerns People* was generally favourable. A pity, therefore, to feel obliged to come back on a point of fact.

Malcolm writes: 'Gramsci's shoddy treatment by the Left as well as by the Fascists is not mentioned.' This is just not so:
1) in a long interview, Gustavo Trombetti, a surviving prison comrade, testifies that Gramsci was increasingly ostracised by his fellow 'politicals' (on one occasion a large stone was lobbed over a wall at him which, had it struck him on the head, would have caused very serious injury);
2) in one of the film's key dramatised prison scenes, Gramsci and his sister-in-law specifically discuss Stalin and Togliatti's cynical failure to pursue negotiations with the fascist authorities for Gramsci's release;
3) beyond the confines of Turi prison, the film portrays Gramsci as trapped between fascism on the one hand and Stalinism on the other, my commentary stating that 'in letting Gramsci perish he [Mussolini] was only doing a job that Stalin might have done more quickly.'

A point of fact within a point of fact: Gramsci's treatment by the Left was not, of course, uniformly shoddy. The film makes that clear too.

Yours faithfully,
DOUGLAS EADIE
Gramsci Writer/Co-Producer
Pelicula Films
Glasgow

Stills

SIR,—I note with horror that there is one massive omission in my letter to SIGHT AND SOUND (Autumn 1987) regarding *Stills* magazine. In my detailed crediting of all those who contributed their time and talent to the

LETTERS

magazine, I failed to mention the enormous and vital contribution of both these by Steve Abbott. I would just like to offer my apologies to Steve, and put the record straight.

Yours faithfully,
SIMON CROCKER
London WC2

Lost magazine

SIR,—I would be most grateful for assistance from the well-informed readers of SIGHT AND SOUND in tracing holdings of an early film magazine issued by the firm M. P. Sales Agency in London, *The Top-Line Indicator*. The BFI has in its collection numbers 1-40 (1912 to mid-1913), but I know from extracts in *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* that *The Top-Line Indicator* continued at least up to number 55. It would be extremely valuable for my research project on early Scandinavian cinema to get hold of *The Top-Line*, as M. P. Sales Agency distributed a handful of the lost films that I need to document. From the extracts, I know that they were released in the period covered by number 45 and onward. If someone should happen to know where the treasure can be found—I have of course already checked the most likely archives like the British Library, etc—please contact me at the Department of Film and Theatre, Lunds University, Helgonabacken 12, S-223 62 Lund, Sweden.

Yours faithfully,
JAN OLSSON

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL ARICK is a 1980 Producer Fellow of the American Film Institute . . . JOHN BELTON co-edited *Film Sound Theory and Practice* with Elisabeth Weis in 1985 . . . GERRY DAVIS is a freelance reporter and broadcaster . . . STEPHEN HAGGARD has recently completed a year as a Harkness Fellow in America, where he worked on exhibitions for the Festival of India in New York . . . ANTHONY SAMPSON, writer and journalist, is the author of *Anatomy of Britain* and of several books on South Africa . . . RICHARD TRAINOR is a California-based freelance writer on films.

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ARTIFICIAL EYE for *The Beekeeper, Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle.*

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●THE GLASS MENAGERIE

(*Columbia*)
In their own quiet, intermittent way, Paul Newman's films as director now add up to quite an impressive body of work on family themes and the struggle of living together. His transcription of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* carries on the strength of those films—an assured handling of actors, an uncluttered but forceful and generally interior *mise en scène* that never *felt* theatrical—and elides it with a theatrical presentation of Williams' play. The Wingfield son Tom (John Malkovich) addresses the audience directly from some unspecified present, putting into period context the suffocating St Louis apartment he shared with his faded Southern-belle mother (Joanne Woodward), crippled sister (Karen Allen), and the Gentleman Caller (James Naughton), who could not provide the salvation expected, only one or two saving touches of humanity. The odd thing is, as firmly as Newman insists that this is a reproduction of the stage play, the fluidity of the treatment and the emotional assurance with which Tom's painful past and baffled present are linked seems purely filmic.

●HOUSE OF GAMES

(*Rank*)
The playwright David Mamet has a sharply schooled company of actors and their ease of playing—in a story about an immensely well-drilled pack of conmen 'stinging' a smart but spiritually troubled lady psychiatrist—is the chief reason why Mamet's assured debut as a feature director has turned out to be such a compelling entertainment. The ease with which crooks can tempt and hoodwink even a fellow 'professional' such as Lindsay Crouse's Dr Margaret Ford, author of the bestseller *Driven*, her masculine hairdo signalling that she is definitely not to be messed with, is Mamet's subject; and his ironic moral, perhaps driven home a shade too unambiguously, is that freed from a tiresome guilt at wrongdoing, and thus capable of 'taking what one wants', the individual will find relief and even contentment. Which is all very well, but what sticks in the mind is a classic poker-game, a charade with a 'mislaid' money bag and a patsy who is of course not a patsy (or is he?), the terror of the psychiatrist as she hears the gate of the rat-trap snap behind her. (Joe Mantegna.)

●LITTLE DORRIT

(*Curzon*)
Stunningly ambitious translation of Dickens' cluttered, complex novel into not just one film but two, totalling six hours, in which the same events and characters, plus a number of parallel incidents, are observed from ingeniously separate viewpoints. In part one, *Nobody's Fault*, the unworldly Arthur Clennam (Derek Jacobi), freshly returned to London after years abroad, falls in love, and devotes himself to securing the release of William Dorrit (Alec Guinness) after 25 years in debtors' prison. In an ironic reversal of roles, Clennam is then himself trapped behind bars. Part two, *Little Dorrit's Story*, shows the revival of the Dorrit fortunes, the family's luckless venture into high society and the untangling of Clennam's predicament by Dorrit's daughter, 'little' Amy. Although painstakingly pruned by director Christine Edzard to preserve the novel's precise, majestic structure—its condemnation of greed, self-deception, poverty and collapse echoing with depressing, timely resonance—the Dickensian pattern of lives remains often bewildering on the screen, mysteriously scattered with loose ends and unidentifiable references. From the production's modest resources, tiny sets, and some patchy process work, emerges an always busy and crowded but equally claustrophobic and gloomy reconstruction of the 1850s. While Little Dorrit herself is perhaps too introspectively played by newcomer Sarah Pickering, the special pleasure of watching Jacobi, Guinness, Bron, Margolyes and many others at finest pitch, even for six hours, more than justifies the whole exercise.

THE ADVENTURES OF MARK TWAIN

(*Entertainment*)
The first feature in Claymation, directed by Will Vinton, the inventor of the process, which was seen in *Return to Oz* and the Oscar-winning short *Closed Mondays*. Mark Twain sets off in a dirigible out of Jules Verne to meet Halley's Comet, and stowaways Huck, Tom and Becky are given insights into his contradictory nature. Delightfully realised, if a little depressing for children.

BELLMAN & TRUE

(*HandMade*)
Middle-aged failure with young stepson in tow is coerced into a bank robbery. Some well-drawn incidentals and apt locations fail to gloss over the uneasy amalgam of heist thriller and domestic drama; and the joint aegis of Euston and HandMade points all too clearly to the split between the protocols of telefilm and movie. (Bernard Hill, Frances Tomelty, Derek Newark; director, Richard Loncraine.)

CREEPSHOW II

(*Entertainment*)
Lacklustre horror anecdotes from Stephen King: a vengeful wooden Indian; a teen-eating floating mess; a zombie hit-and-run victim. Silly, with ugly linking cartoons. (Dorothy Lamour, George Kennedy; director, Michael Gornick.)

DEAD OF WINTER

(*UIP*)
Aspiring actress, offered role in low-budget movie, finds herself caught up instead in a macabre conspiracy. A largely predictable woman-in-jeopardy melodrama hardly seems a fruitful vehicle for Arthur Penn (who has anyway claimed his credit is something of a front for co-writer/producer Marc Shmuger). But the result is in its own way quite diverting, with amusingly stylised atmosphere and an ingenious eye for detail. (Mary Steenburgen.)

HAIL! HAIL! ROCK 'N' ROLL

(*UIP*)
Taylor Hackford's study of the Chuck Berry phenomenon, composed with tact, timing and admiration, contrives to be one of the best rock films ever. Berry rehearses with band and guests, recalls early successes and failures, celebrates his 60th birthday with a magnificent concert in St Louis, and adroitly guards his privacy through a volley of interviews. A touch long, but an astute and mesmerising portrait, packed with vintage hits. (Keith Richards, Eric Clapton.)

INNERSPACE

(*Warner Bros*)
A comic revision of Richard Fleischer's *Fantastic Voyage*, in which a miniaturised *Top Gun* type, intended for experimental injection into a rabbit, is shot instead into the posterior of a goonish supermarket clerk. Joe Dante winds up the pace and the comic-strip gags adeptly enough, but does not make the most of the Jiminy Cricket comedy of the super-nerd who finds himself controlled by a super-jock pilot. (Dennis Quaid, Martin Short.)

ISHTAR

(*Columbia*)
Elaine May's epic version of the Hope-Crosby-Lamour movies, which is better before it gets on the road, while Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman are struggling with death, despair and other hazards of aspiring songwriters in New York. The perils get more outlandish in the mythical kingdom of Ishtar, but don't get any funnier. (Isabelle Adjani, Charles Grodin.)

A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

(*Warner Bros*)
Two men haunted by war set about tasks of restoration in a placid Yorkshire setting. Closely following J. L. Carr's delicate text, Pat O'Connor's style is dreamily restrained, a convalescent fantasy about love, faith and disillusionment, with an appealing cast carefully saying nothing in particular. Lots of atmosphere and period flavours, but frustratingly inconclusive. (Kenneth Branagh, Colin Firth, Natasha Richardson.)

MY SWEET LITTLE VILLAGE

(*Cannon*)
Amiable collection of quarrels, crises and liaisons in rustic Czech community, closely observed with broad, rather ponderous humour. Mildly charming, but with much the same material Jiri Menzel has been more inventive and more mellow in the past. (Janos Ban, Marian Labuda.)

NO WAY OUT

(*Rank*)
Kenneth Fearing's fine thriller *The Big Clock*, filmed straight by John Farrow in 1948, is here wearisomely tricked out in fashionable fancy dress: computer technology, a Pentagon setting, a Commie conspiracy. Buried under the unnecessary luggage are fine performances from Kevin Costner and Sean Young as the lovers menaced by megalomania. (Gene Hackman; director, Roger Donaldson.)

THE PICK-UP ARTIST

(*UKFD*)
In the four years that James Toback has been trying to make *The Pick-Up Artist*, it seems to have undergone some unproductive sea changes. A tale of sexual obsession, gambling fever and underworld threat has come out as a mildly wacky comedy for the youth-movie duo of Molly Ringwald and Robert Downey Jr. In the process, Toback's signature has been elided with John Hughes'. (Harvey Keitel, Dennis Hopper.)

SPACEBALLS

(*UIP*)
Mel Brooks turns his parodic eye on sci-fi movies, achieving only a puerile pastiche of *Star Wars* laden with groaning jokes. A few genuinely bright ideas struggle for survival amid the frenzy which passes for direction. (Mel Brooks, John Candy, Rick Moranis.)

THE WHALES OF AUGUST

(*Curzon*)
Lindsay Anderson on the wild shores of Maine, with a stage piece about growing old gracefully, or not. Lillian Gish and Bette Davis spar splendidly as sisters at odds over a picture-window—and the likelihood of a visit from the whales of yesteryear—but as a mood piece this seems strangely confined, caught between a full-blown theatricality and the grace notes of Fordian elegy. (Vincent Price, Ann Sothern, Harry Carey Jr.)

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